



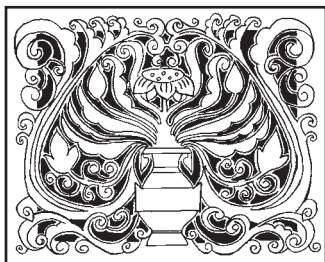
PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

*A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

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Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat • 262 524
Uttaranchal, India
E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata • 700 014
Tel: 91 • 33 • 2244 0898 / 2245 2383 /
2245 0050 / 2216 4000
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

In Praise of Swami Vivekananda

February 2007
Vol. 112, No. 2

नमामि वन्द्यं विवेकानन्दं धराहृदयारविन्दम् ।
विश्वचन्दनं निःस्वनन्दनं ओंकारनादविन्दम् ॥

I bow down to the adorable Vivekananda, the very lotus-heart of the globe, the cooling emollient (sandalpaste) to the woes of the world, the joy of the poor, the very essence of Omkara (Om).

नवधर्मधुरं भवमर्मचरं मथितमनोमकरन्दम् ॥
प्रेमपथकरं क्षेमशतधरं रणितब्रह्मानन्दम् ॥

Proclaimer of a new dharma—based on the essentials of human nature—the churned up nectar of (human) hearts, paving the path of love, conducive to the welfare of many, ringing in the bliss of Brahman.

स्थिरशान्तिहरं चिरभ्रान्तिहरं मर्दितद्वेषद्वन्द्वम् ।
रोचनऋषिवरं मोचनतत्परं कर्तितभवभयबन्धम् ॥

The harbinger of undisturbable peace, eternal dispeller of delusion, conqueror of hatred and conflict, brilliant sage supreme, ever keen on liberation, cutting asunder the bonds of worldly fear.

शोकभञ्जनं लोकरञ्जनं परदोषदर्शनानन्दम् ॥
गुणिगणगञ्जनं मुनिजनखञ्जनं पूतपारिजातगन्धम् ॥

Destroyer of sorrow, the delight of humanity, blind to the faults of others, excelling the virtuous, surpassing all ascetics, with the heavenly fragrance of purity. ...

जीवशिवदासं क्लीवजननाशं नवयुगप्राणस्पन्दम् ।
नमामि वन्द्यं विवेकानन्दमालोकामृतस्कन्दम् ॥

The servant of Shiva in the form of the living, destroyer of all weakness, the very life-breath of a new age, the shower of nectarine light that is the worshipful Vivekananda, him I salute.

—Dr Roma Chaudhuri, *Sri Vivekananda Vandana*

THIS MONTH

Swami Vivekananda studies are a vast and continually burgeoning field, engaging a host of researchers from diverse disciplines. This number, **Remembering Swami Vivekananda – 1**, brings into focus a few of the many facets that comprise Swami Vivekananda.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago provides a glimpse into the mind of Swami Vivekananda through an excerpt from *The Master as I Saw Him* by Sister Nivedita.



Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda

is an intimate account of Swami Vivekananda as he appeared to Mrs Alice M Hansbrough, who served him devotedly during his stay in Los Angeles and San Francisco in 1899–1900. The transcript of

these reminiscences has been made available by the Vedanta Society of Northern California. The text has been edited by Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, and a group of Vedanta students.

Besides providing a chronological picture of his activities and insight into the evolution of his thought, Swami Vivekananda's letters reveal his intensely human personality and the depth of his human relationships. These are highlighted in the study of **Swami Vivekananda's Letters to Haridas Desai** by Sri Dushyant Pandya, a devotee and scholar of repute from Jamnagar.

Even before he addressed the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, Swami Vivekananda was engaged

in scholarly debates on issues pertaining to India. **Swami Vivekananda on the Economic Plight of India** sheds light on one such engagement at the American Social Science Association. This meeting has been researched by Dr Gordon R Stavig, Hollywood.

That the spirit of Swami Vivekananda is very much alive is evidenced by his continued appeal to all sections of society. **Unfolding Youthful Energies** is one account of this charismatic charm of Swamiji as reflected in the National Youth Day Competitions organized by *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the Tamil monthly of the Ramakrishna Order.

In the first instalment of **On Ethics, Education, and Swami Vivekananda**, Prof. Bharati Ganguli, former Principal, Institute for Education of Women, Chandranagar, explores the concepts of values, value judgements, and utility as reflected in the thoughts of some Western thinkers as well as Swami Vivekananda.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head, Department of English, Osmania University, continues his survey of the impact of **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta** on contemporary thought and literature, focusing on texts dealing with mysticism, magic, the Mother Goddess, and Shiva.

If every Indian city has its own heritage and its own cultural and religious history, Madurai can claim the distinction of being a quintessential 'Temple City'. The renowned Minakshi temple is the hub that powers the religious, cultural, commercial, and political might of this ancient city. Sri N Hariharan, a local resident, recreates **Madurai, the Legendary Temple City** through an engaging dialogue.

Remembering Swami Vivekananda – I

THE human personality is essentially a bundle of memories. Our bodies are cast from the genetic memory that lies ensconced at the centre of every cell making up our tissues. Our psyche is a template moulded by our past actions, the grooves in which serve as channels for the flow of our thoughts and actions. And the huge reservoir of subliminal memories decides our propensities, innate skills, and the directions that our instinctual energies take. Consciously or unconsciously, we live our memories.

The Vagaries of Memory

Given the importance of memory in our lives, one would presume that nature would have given us robust mechanisms for recording objective facts, assessing the validity of our memory records, and protecting this record against the vagaries of time. True it has, but as both brain and mind are material entities, memory has its limitations. If memory is what we rely on to get our acts right, our memories also deceive us all too often. In fact, the very processes that allow the mind to use its memory capabilities in uniquely resourceful ways are also responsible for the caprice and frailties of memory with which we are all too familiar.

The human mind's exceptional capacity to generalize from limited information and to match patterns are cases in point. No computer has been able to approach anywhere near this capability till date. But what the mind gains in terms of extensivity, it loses in terms of accuracy. For generalizations from limited information are always liable to being incorrect. The last two Australians I met, and it is not often that I meet Australians, were rather brusque. I start having a suspicion that Australians, in general, are rude. Now when I meet another Australian

who tells me to my face that I am not helpful, my suspicion turns into a firm belief, a belief that may well last my lifetime.

Our ability to match patterns can also lead us on to false trails. We might remember losing our way in a residential complex even though we had been there once earlier. Every street seemed to be the one we were looking for, and yet it wasn't. If we happen to know a pair of twins, we would remember how we often mistake one for the other. Less innocuous are situations when the victim of a crime misidentifies the criminal in an identification parade, leading to miscarriage of justice. Formal studies have shown that such mix-up of memory is not at all uncommon.

The reason for the selectivity of memories and the mix-ups therein lies in the way our memories are manufactured and retrieved. What we choose to or are forced to remember is significantly affected by our emotional disposition. When in good mood we are likely to notice and recall happy events, while negative information sticks to our minds more easily during foul moods. More interestingly, information learnt when one is in a particular mood is more likely to be recalled when one is in a similar mood. That is why the whole world seems to be against you when you are depressed, and everything appears bright and sunny when you are in good mood.

Highly emotional events are likely to light up our memory rather vividly, a phenomenon called flashbulb memory. Most octogenarian Indians are likely to remember where they were when they got the news of Gandhiji's assassination, and most city-bred youth will be able to recall what they were doing when they heard about the attack on the New York twin towers. But very few of us will be able

to list all that we did on a particular day last week, simply because no strong emotions are attached to our daily routine.

Two processes involved in ensuring accurate memory are *source monitoring* and *reality monitoring*; and both of these are prone to errors. Try to recall the last time you were involved in a group discussion where many ideas were shared. You are very likely to remember some statement that was mentioned, of which you are unsure who said it. But what we are unlikely to notice is that we often attribute statements to wrong persons due to a confusion of sources. We may be very sure that someone made a certain statement, which in actual fact that person never did.

Reality monitoring is the process of deciding if a memory was generated from external events that we actually experienced or from our internal world of thought and imagination. Remember how after a busy hour in the kitchen you rushed back to your room and were then unsure if you switched off the gas? You seemed to remember you did, but when you went down and checked, you found you hadn't. This confusion of reality could also have serious consequences during eye-witness testimony. Researchers have documented that eye-witness accounts of events, which are given great weight in legal decisions, may not be as accurate as we take them to be. On occasions eye-witnesses may actually end up bearing false witness unknowingly.

Besides confusion of sources and the mix-up of objective and subjective facts, eye-witness errors can be induced through several other mechanisms. One of these is *suggestibility*, wherein leading questions shape our recall and response. For instance, the question 'What was the brand of most of the scooters involved in the melee?' is likely to elicit a brand name from a distant witness called to a trial many months after a road accident, even though, in reality, it was motorbikes that were primarily involved in the accident. We also tend to construct false memories unconsciously to give greater logical coherence to our recall. Children are known to build up elaborate imaginary stories in their minds

which they often take to be real; this mental propensity may continue throughout our lives in varying degrees.

Remembering History

The chances that we will get called to testify at a trial are rather slim, and we rarely notice the distortions in memory that we suffer from. Even if we do take notice, such mix-ups are usually innocuous and are more likely to amuse than alarm us. And this is how it should be if we are to lead healthy lives.

But if you are a critical reader, as you go through this and the next issue—which focus on Swami Vivekananda—you may be tempted to ask: What is the validity of the rich array of texts pertaining or attributed to Swami Vivekananda that are presented in these pages? For many of you, qualification for publication in this journal is in itself proof of their validity. For others it is the credentials of the author that grant the texts their validity. For still others it is the referencing that ensures authenticity.

The more fastidious among you may wish to question the internal validity of the texts. What, for instance, is the accuracy of Mrs Hansbrough's reminiscences of Swamiji several decades after she last happened to be with him? How does her age affect her recall? Does it matter who was interviewing her, and what type of questions he chose to ask her? Are the records likely to have deteriorated with time? Does it matter who transcribes the texts and who edits them? Are all these questions likely to have a bearing on our understanding of the person that was Swami Vivekananda? Is it going to affect our understanding of his message?

If our individual memories shape our personalities, history is shaped by our collective memories etched out in different media—archeological remains, written texts, oral tradition, and the like—all of which are as likely to be affected by the vagaries of selective and inaccurate documentation and faulty reading as our individual memories. It would be interesting to examine if our understanding of these facts affects our understanding of who Swami Vivekananda was.



Prabuddha Bharata—100 years ago

The Master as I Saw Him: February 1907

As to the power of silence and retirement to make illumination visible, we had many opportunities of judging. For over and over again the Swami would break away, to return unexpectedly. It sometimes seemed as if life in society were an agony to him. He grew nervous under the gaze of numbers of admirers who had heard of his great fame, and would enter his boat and sit watching him, leaving him no privacy. The life of the silent ashen-clad wanderer, or the hidden hermit, he thought of, it would now and then seem, as the lover might think of the beloved. At no time would it have surprised us, had someone told us that to-day or tomorrow he would be gone for ever; that we were now listening to his voice for the last time. He, and necessarily we, in all that depended on him, were as straws carried on the Ganges of the Eternal Will. At any moment It might reveal Itself to him as silence. At any moment life in the world might end for him.

This plan-less-ness was not an accident. Never can I forget the disgust with which he turned on myself once, a couple of years later, when I had offered him some piece of worldly wisdom regarding his own answer to a letter which he had brought for me to see. "Plans! Plans!" he exclaimed in indignation. "That is why you Western people can never create a religion! If any of you ever did, it was only a few Catholic saints, who had no plans. Religion was never never preached by planners!"

As it was, in the course of that pleasant summer-journey, we were always liable to hear from the servants that the Swami's boat had left its moorings an hour ago, and would not return to-day. He might be away in fact, either one or many days. We never knew. But always he returned from these lonely retreats with shining of radiance and peace,

and ever-deepening utterance of knowledge. ...

Even apart from the greater revelations and experiences, flashes from the beacon-fire of that life in whose shadow we dwelt, fell constantly upon us. Once he had just returned from an absence, and as he sat talking of bhakti, a servant came to say his meal was ready. But we could see how intolerable was the thought of food, to one who was still living on the heights of the love of God. Again it was evening, and we women-folk were seated in the boat of *Sthir Mâtâ*, as we called our hostess, chatting in low tones, in the falling dusk, when suddenly he came in to spend a few minutes with us. The talk turned on the approaching departure for Europe; but it soon ended; and then one who expected to be left alone in India, spoke of how the others would be missed. The Swami turned on her with a wonderful gentleness. "But why so serious about it?" he said. "Why not touch hands and part with a smile? You are so morbid, you Westerns! You worship sorrow! All through your country I found that. Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter, but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface: beneath, it is full of tragic intensity. Now here, it is sad and gloomy on the outside, but underneath are carelessness and merriment.

"You know, we have a theory that the Universe is God's manifestation of Himself, just for fun, that the Incarnations came and lived here, 'just for fun.' Play, it was all play. Why was Christ crucified? it was mere play. And so of life. Just play with the Lord. Say, 'It is all play. It is all play.' Do you do anything?" And then, without another word, he turned and went out into the starlight, and passed into his own boat. And we also, in the hush of the river, said goodnight and parted. —*Sister Nivedita*

Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*

Mrs Alice M Hansbrough

ONE bright Sunday morning in March 1941, Swami Ashokananda invited Mrs Alice M Hansbrough to drive home with him from his lecture at the Century Club in San Francisco. On the way, driving by a roundabout route over San Francisco's many hills to enjoy a sun made welcome by weeks of rain, the swami asked Mrs Hansbrough if she could not give an account of her contacts with Swami Vivekananda during his visit to California in the winter of 1899 and 1900. Mrs Hansbrough had met Swamiji in Los Angeles a few days after his arrival there, and from the day of the meeting, had become a faithful follower. She served him devotedly during his stay in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and during her intimate contacts with him had many glimpses of Swamiji's spiritual greatness and of his human qualities as well.

Mrs Hansbrough readily agreed to give whatever recollections Swami Ashokananda desired. The swami evidently had already given considerable thought to the proposal, and ways and means were discussed. It was arranged that he should go to Mrs Hansbrough's home and that, through questions, he would suggest to her a direction of conversation

which would bring out all that she could remember of her contacts with Swami Vivekananda; and that the swami would have someone (Mr A T Clifton) with him to take down the conversations. These talks covered several meetings, the first of which took place the day following Swami Ashokananda's first proposal of the subject to Mrs Hansbrough.



Swami Ashokananda, 1938

Monday Evening, March 3, 1941

Swami Ashokananda arrived at Mrs Hansbrough's home a little after eight o'clock in the evening. She was living with her daughter, Mrs Paul Cohn, at 451 Avila Street, near the broad Marina parkway on San Francisco Bay. As the swami walked to the door of the handsome Spanish-style residence, he caught a glimpse of Mrs Hansbrough reading beside the fire in the living room. In a moment she had greeted the swami at the door and escorted him to a seat before the fire.

The door to the spacious, high-ceilinged living room was across one corner; and across the corner to the right was the broad hearth of the fireplace, with a couch at right angles on the right, and comfortable chairs opposite. Another couch stood against the wall beyond, and in the far corner was a handsome old grand piano. The swami chose a

* In 1941 Mrs Alice Hansbrough gave these valuable reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda in a series of informal interviews with Swami Ashokananda in San Francisco. They were recorded by Mr A T Clifton (later Swami Chidrupananda), who was present at the interviews. Marie Louise Burke used portions of these reminiscences in her work *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. Swami Chetananda and a group of Vedanta students have revised and reorganized the original manuscript of reminiscences for publication. It has been made available for publication by courtesy of the Vedanta Society of Northern California.

chair, and Mrs Hansbrough sat on one couch in the light of a small table lamp.

Mrs Hansbrough was now well on in years [75 years old], but still was blessed with a keen intelligence and a ready humour, which must surely have endeared her to Swamiji. She was slight and below medium height, dignified and unvaryingly good natured in her manner, and possessed of a natural peacefulness which communicated itself to others. Her memory was clear and her conversation therefore filled with interesting details.

After inquiring about Mrs Hansbrough's daughter, Swami Ashokananda said: 'Let us begin with your first acquaintance with Swamiji's work. How did you first hear about him?'

'I first learned of Swamiji in the spring of 1897 at a lecture in San Francisco about three years before he came to California,' Mrs Hansbrough replied. 'Two friends and I went to hear a Mrs Annie Rix Miltz speak on some metaphysical subject, and in the course of her talk she brought out some points from Swamiji's *Raja Yoga* and also quoted from the book. I was leaving not long after for Alaska, and my friends asked me what I would like for a steamer present. *Raja Yoga* was my answer. At the Emporium where they went to get it, the clerk inquired if it was for someone interested in such subjects. When they said it was, he recommended that they also get Swamiji's *Karma Yoga*, as the two were, as he said, "parts of a set". So I left for Alaska armed with the two books.

'Our ship was a steam schooner. The captain was not familiar with the course and we went far out of our way on the voyage. The result was four weeks en route, during which time I read from my books. I started with *Karma Yoga*, but found it a bit too high in thought for me, so put it aside and read *Raja Yoga* first. Then when I had finished it, I went back to *Karma Yoga* and read that. During the two years I was in Alaska I read both books over again many times.

'I remember that I used to read for a while, and the thought would come to me, "What marvellous thoughts these are!" I would hold the place with

my finger, close the book and shut my eyes and think, "What a wonderful man he must be who wrote these words!" And I would try to form a picture in my mind of what he looked like.

'I met a man in Alaska who was interested in Theosophy. We used to talk about Swamiji's books and he looked through them; but he did not find anything interesting in them because he felt they were not Theosophy.'

'And after you returned from Alaska,' Swami Ashokananda asked, 'did you go to Los Angeles?'

'Yes,' Mrs Hansbrough replied. 'I came through San Francisco on the way, and arrived in Los Angeles on November 23, 1899. Swamiji had been in Los Angeles only a few days, I later learned.' [Swamiji arrived on December 3, 1899.]

'How did you first happen to meet him?' Swami Ashokananda asked.



Mrs Blodgett's cottage, sketched by Miss MacLeod: 'windmill ... Eucalyptus ... House overgrown with roses - geraniums - heliotrope - chrysanthemum etc. etc. etc. ... Cypress hedges'

'Well, perhaps you would like to hear first what circumstances brought him to the West Coast,' Mrs Hansbrough suggested. 'The brother of Miss Josephine MacLeod at whose home Swamiji had been staying in New York, had been ill in Arizona with tuberculosis for some time. By the time November came, Mr MacLeod was not expected to live; and the wife of his business partner, a Mr Blodgett, wired Miss MacLeod to come west to see him, which she did. The brother died on November 2, 1899, however, and Miss MacLeod stayed on in Los Angeles, at Mrs Blodgett's house at 921 West 21st

Street, where Swamiji later came.'

'Can you get a photograph of the house?' Swami Ashokananda asked.

'I might be able to,' Mrs Hansbrough said. 'Well, when Miss MacLeod first entered her brother's bedroom at Mrs Blodgett's house, the first thing she saw was a full-page newspaper picture of Swamiji—you know that one that you have in your office in the Berkeley Temple, where he stands partly turned to the left—which Mrs Blodgett had taken from a Chicago paper and had framed. It hung above her brother's bed.

"Where did you get that?" Miss MacLeod exclaimed. Mrs Blodgett told her she had heard Swami Vivekananda speak in Chicago and had cut the picture out of one of the papers at the time. "Well, Swami Vivekananda is our guest now in New York!" Miss MacLeod said.'

Swami Ashokananda then asked, 'Mrs Blodgett had some healing power, didn't she?'

'I never heard of it,' Mrs Hansbrough answered.

'Miss MacLeod said so some years ago at Mayavati,' the swami remarked. 'She said this was the reason it was suggested that Swamiji come to Los Angeles, as he had been unwell for a long time.' [Miss MacLeod took Swamiji to a healer named Mrs Melton.]

Mrs Hansbrough said she remembered that Mrs Leggett had come to Los Angeles for some such reason, and Swami Ashokananda was surprised to learn that Mrs Leggett had come west at all. After some discussion on this point, the conversation turned to Mrs Hansbrough's first hearing a lecture by Swami Vivekananda.

'It was on December 8, 1899,' she said. 'My sister

Helen came home that evening and said: "Who do you think is going to speak in Los Angeles tonight? Swami Vivekananda!" All during the two years I had been reading his books in Alaska I had never expected to see him. Well, we rushed through

dinner, made up a party, and went in. The lecture was at eight o'clock. Blanchard Hall was on Broadway between Eighth and Hill Streets. The audience was between six and eight hundred people, and everyone was enchanted with Swamiji. This was his first lecture in California and the subject was "The Vedanta Philosophy".

'He was introduced by a Professor Baumgardt, who had arranged for the hall and the lecture. Professor Baumgardt was connected with one of the Los Angeles newspapers in some busi-

ness capacity. He was an astronomer. He had met Swamiji through the Academy of Sciences, which was a group of prominent scientists and scholars who had gathered together and called themselves by that name. Mrs Blodgett, with whom Swamiji was staying at the time, had introduced both Swamiji and Miss MacLeod to these men, and it was through these introductions that this first lecture came about. She also introduced him to a wealthy family called the Stimsons, with whom Swamiji later stayed for a week or so, but I don't think he enjoyed his visit with them.

'Professor Baumgardt had asked Swamiji to give the same lecture he had given at the Brooklyn Institute on the Vedanta Philosophy. When the lecture was over, the professor complained that it was not the same lecture at all; and Swamiji told him that it was impossible for him ever to give the same lecture twice: that he could talk on the same subject, but it



would not be the same.'

'How was Swamiji dressed?' Swami Ashokananda asked.

'He wore a yellow robe and turban.'

'Yellow?'

'Well, a light orange, a little lighter than the robe you use,' Mrs Hansbrough replied.

'And how did he look?'

'His complexion was lighter than all the swamis here today, except Swami Devatmananda,' Mrs Hansbrough said. 'His hair was black—very black—with not one grey hair. A lady once asked him later on if Hindus' hair ever turned grey!'

'How did he impress you?' Swami Ashokananda then asked.

'I got the same impression I had previously had of him; that is, he was a most impressive personality. You know, you have told me that it is not possible to get an impression of a personality from the individual's writings; but I felt that I had sensed Swamiji's personality from his books, and the impression was verified when I heard him speak.

'His voice I should say was baritone—certainly nearer to bass than tenor; and it was the most musical voice I have ever heard. At the end of the lecture he closed with that chant, "I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute." Everyone was enchanted with his talk.

'Whenever he quoted from Sanskrit he would chant the quotation—'

'He would actually chant?' Swami Ashokananda interrupted to ask.

'Yes,' Mrs Hansbrough replied. 'He would chant in Sanskrit and then translate. Once later on he apologized for quoting in Sanskrit, and explained that he still thought in that language and then had to translate his thoughts into English.

'When it was over, the rest of our party went up on the platform where a number of people had collected to speak to Swamiji. I sought out Professor Baumgardt, however, to find out when and where Swamiji was going to lecture again. When I asked him he inquired, "Are you interested in the swami's teachings?" I told him I had been studying them for

two years, and he said, "Well, I will introduce you to the swami's hostess." He introduced me to Miss MacLeod, who, when I told her I had been studying Swamiji's works for so long, asked if I wouldn't like to go to call on him. Of course I said I would be delighted, and so it was arranged. It was not until after his second lecture, however, that we did meet him.'

'And what and where was his second lecture?' Swami Ashokananda asked.

'His second lecture [on December 12] was also arranged by the Academy of Sciences,' Mrs Hansbrough said. 'But this one was held in the Congregational Church and was free, whereas tickets had been required for the first one. The subject was, "The Building of the Cosmos," and it was equally as enchanting as the first one. I still have a copy of it, and often read it.'

'You have a copy of that lecture!' Swami Ashokananda exclaimed. 'Are you sure?'

Mrs Hansbrough assured the swami that she was. Here the talk turned for the moment to Mrs Hansbrough's collection of notes, early copies of the *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*, and notes belonging to Dr M Logan on the founding of the San Francisco Vedanta Society. Then Mrs Hansbrough spoke again of the work in Southern California.

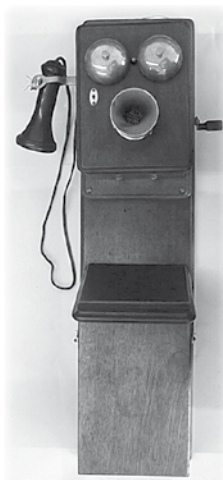
'Did you know that a Vedanta Society was actually established in Pasadena?' she asked. 'It was suggested to Swamiji that he visit Pasadena, which he did. There he met a Mrs Emeline Bowler, a wealthy woman who was president of the Shakespeare Club, and with whom Swamiji later spent a few days. During this visit, however, he wrote me that he was not happy there, and asked me to go and get him.'

Swami Ashokananda laughed at this.

'Why do you laugh?' Mrs Hansbrough asked him.

'Well, it is amusing that Swamiji had to ask you to go and get him,' the swami replied.

'He always did that,' Mrs Hansbrough said. 'Invariably he either phoned or wrote me whenever he wanted to leave any place. For instance, later in San



Telephone from ca. 1900

Francisco he was the guest of some physician, and had expected to stay for some time. But the very day he went to the doctor's home he either phoned or wrote me—I forget now, which he did—to come for him. When I arrived, his hostess came in, introduced herself, and then withdrew again. Then Swamiji explained: "The trouble is, she is not a lady: she doesn't know what to do with me!"

'But to return to Pasadena,' Mrs Hansbrough continued. 'It was in the rooms of the Shakespeare Club that the Pasadena Society was formed. I had suggested it, but Swamiji had no interest in organizing. "It won't last," he said—and he said the same about the San Francisco Society later. Nevertheless, we went ahead with the project. He was present at the organization meeting, but as I say, he was not interested in the proceedings. I had drawn up a set

of proposed by-laws, in which a proposal was included that each member pledge to contribute to the Society for a period of ten years. Mrs Bowler objected to this, on the grounds that a member might die during the ten years. I said that would be all right: the deceased member would then be excused from further contributions. This amused Swamiji greatly.

'Mrs Bowler was perhaps overly interested in the financial affairs of Swamiji's lectures. Later, when I had begun to help Swamiji with arrangements for hall rentals, placing the newspaper advertisements, and so on, she once asked me, "How much are you getting for this?" I told her the truth: "The privilege of paying for the halls. And we are not wealthy people, Mrs Bowler."'

* * *

'I might mention here, speaking of the organization of the Pasadena centre, that it was I who suggested the founding of the San Francisco centre also. We held two meetings for the purpose, as the details were not completed at the first meeting. At this first meeting, I suggested to Swamiji that he leave before the meeting opened. He asked me why, and I told him that it was because I wanted to say some things about him that I would rather he did not hear. So he agreed, and went home with X. It was not that his staying would have made any difference to Swamiji; my reason for asking this was that I myself would have been embarrassed to speak as I wanted to about him in his presence. I then told the group about the arrangements which had been made in Los Angeles and Pasadena, and we proceeded with the organization here [in San Francisco].'

Here Swami Ashokananda asked about Mrs Hansbrough's first meeting with Swamiji.

'It was the day following his second lecture,' she told him. 'As I mentioned, Miss MacLeod had arranged for us to call on him at Mrs Blodgett's home, and my sister Helen and I went in the morning. He was dressed to receive us in the long, knee-length coat we see in the picture where he stands with Sister Lalita [Mrs Hansbrough's sister, Carrie Mead



Blanchard Hall, Los Angeles

Wyckoff]. He wore a kind of minister's collar with what must have been a clerical vest; and his hair was covered by a black turban, which rolled back something like those the women wear here now. This was the dress he always wore on the street.'

'Was Miss MacLeod present at this first meeting?' Swami Ashokananda inquired.

'She was there at first,' Mrs Hansbrough said, 'but she went out after a few minutes. Later she told me that she always did this when visitors first called on the swami, because she felt the visitors liked it better.'

'And how did you feel about Swamiji when you met him?'

'I can only describe myself as enchanted by him,' Mrs Hansbrough answered. 'As I mentioned, this was my feeling from his books before I ever saw him, and the feeling has stayed with me throughout my life.'

'And what did he talk about with you at this first meeting?'

'The conversation was only general. He was rather shy and reserved in manner, as I remember. He said he was very glad we were interested in his lectures. We asked how long he expected to stay in Los Angeles, and he replied that he did not know, but that if we cared to arrange a class, he would be glad to address the group.'

'Naturally, with such an offer, we eagerly went about getting a class together, and the first meeting was in the Blanchard Building, December 19. There were three meetings over a period of a week [December 19, 21, and 22] in this first series of classes, for which each person paid a dollar for every meeting.'

'We had three rooms in the Blanchard Building, which opened into one another. The arrangement was not very satisfactory, especially since the attendance was running between 150 and 200. So when Mr J Ransome Bransby suggested moving to a

nice chapel, which he could arrange for at the Home of Truth, it was decided to follow his suggestion. Accordingly, Swamiji moved there, and gave two more series of classes.'

'Now, tell me,' Swami Ashokananda asked, 'what disposition was made of the money taken in from these classes?'

'We gave it all to Swamiji,' Mrs Hansbrough replied.

'Was there no printing of leaflets or anything of the sort?'

'I don't think so, although there may have been.'

'Did Swamiji keep any account of the money?'

'Never. He never knew anything about the financial details connected with the work.'

'And was this true of San Francisco, too?'

'Yes.'

'Now, there I have you,' Swami Ashokananda said with a playful smile, 'for I have documentary proof that he did. When I was in India in 1934 and 1935, I was allowed to go through all the papers in his room, and among his things I found a notebook in which there were accounts, in Swamiji's own handwriting, of income and expenditures in connection with his lectures and classes.'

'Oh yes, afterward Swamiji may have made such records,' Mrs Hansbrough replied. 'But if he did, they were made from statements I gave him, for he never paid any attention to the money at the time.'

(To be continued)



Swami Vivekananda in Pasadena; Sister Lalita is standing on the porch behind

Swami Vivekananda's Letters to Haridas Desai

Dushyant Pandya

THE total number of letters written by Swami Vivekananda which have thus far been recovered and published in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* is 777.¹ We are struck with awe to learn that these rich letters were written by Swamiji while he was wandering from place to place over three continents, often not sure of where he would be the next day.

Haridas Viharidas Desai, the dewan of Junagadh state in the peninsula of Saurashtra, Gujarat, was the recipient of thirteen of these letters from Swamiji. Swamiji first met the dewan probably in early 1892, and right from the beginning, a bond of great affection seems to have existed between them.

Haridas Desai was born on 29 July 1840 in Nadiad, a very small town in Kheda district, central Gujarat. The land is fertile, receiving 100 to 120 cm of rain per year, and various crops are grown there. The Patels of the district have been hardworking farmers, earning rich dividends. Haridas belonged to such a family.

Christian missionaries and the British rulers had been opening schools in western India since 1818, and Haridas enjoyed the benefit of that new education. He also studied law. He was very intelligent, and by the age of only seventeen or eighteen was employed by the British Government.

Haridas soon started advancing in the bureaucratic hierarchy by dint of his intelligence, honesty, grasp of problems, and ability to take correct decisions to solve them. By 1890, when he was

just thirty years of age, his services were lent to the princely states of Wadhwan and Wankaner—both in Saurashtra, then called Kathiawad—and the state of Idar in north Gujarat. As the dewan of these states, he modernized their administrative structure, wiped out fiscal deficits, and made them financially viable. His talents came

to the notice of the viceregal government, and he was appointed a member of the Finance Committee of the Government of India when he was just 34. Later on, in 1893, he was honoured with an appointment to the Royal Opium Commission. The Nawab of Junagadh also took notice of his talents and requested the Governor of Bombay to lend Haridas's services to his state in 1883.



Haridas Viharidas Desai

Swami Vivekananda landed in Gujarat towards the end of 1891. His first halt was at Ahmedabad. From there he turned west and reached Wadhwan. From Wadhwan he walked to Limbdi, about twenty-five kilometers to the south. How he came into contact with Sri Jaswant Singh, the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi, is well-known.

The Thakore Saheb, after coming to know of Swamiji's itinerary, is likely to have introduced him to Haridas. Haridas Desai and Swamiji were so impressed by each other that a close, intimate relationship quickly sprung up between them. Perhaps because of this bond, Swamiji visited Junagadh more than once. The depth of affection between the two can be glimpsed from the thirteen letters Swamiji wrote to Haridas, eight from India and five from

far-away America.

Letters from India

According to the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, during his stay with Haridas, Swamiji spent a few days practising meditation in a cave in Girnar, about three kilometers south of Junagadh; while he was there, Haridas sent someone to inquire about his health and comfort. Swamiji's first letter to Haridas was sent from Girnar and expresses his 'heartfelt gratitude' for this act of fatherly kindness.²

Swamiji stayed at Junagadh several times during his wanderings in Kathiawar. He also visited Nadiad, the native place of the dewan, on his way to Baroda. The purpose of his visiting Nadiad was twofold. He met there the brothers of the dewan and also the great Gujarati savant Manilal Nabhubhai Dwivedi, a leading literary figure of the age and a reputed scholar of Vedanta, who would later send a paper or two to be read at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. Neither his orthodoxy nor his health would permit him to cross the oceans.

From Nadiad, Swamiji proceeded to Baroda, where, thanks to the recommendations of Haridas, Swamiji became the guest of Sri Manilal Jashbhai, the dewan of Baroda. Swamiji's second letter to Haridas Desai, dated 26 April 1892, is penned from Baroda.

The first thing that strikes us is that this letter is written in reply to Haridas's letter. Swamiji points out the nobility of the dewan's brothers at Nadiad: 'And your brothers, they are what they should be, *your brothers*.' In the postscript to this letter he mentions his meeting with Sri Dwivedi at Nadiad.

The third letter, dated 15 June 1892 and written from Poona, sheds light on the intimacy between Swamiji and Haridas. Swamiji expresses his hope that 'perhaps by this time every hitch has been removed from your way in Junagadh. ... I am very anxious to learn about your health, especially that sprain.'

The fourth letter, dated 1892 and written from Bombay, is a letter recommending one Akshaya Kumar Ghose. Herein Swamiji comes through as

humbleness personified. He seems to have received a favourable reply from the dewan, as is evinced by his letter of 22 August 1892 from Bombay. Swamiji's experience of being a guest of the Maharashtrians does not seem to have been a happy one, even though Pandit Shankar Pandurang, the dewan of Porbandar—a Maharashtrian himself—was full of kindness and gentlemanliness. This letter reveals in clear terms the filial bond tying Swamiji with Haridas: 'It is impossible that I should ever forget your fatherly kindness and care of me.'

The next two letters, of 28 April and of May 1893, from Khetri, show the humour in Swamiji, his humility in apologizing for his action—rather inaction of not having been able to go to Nadiad—and his good wishes for the dewan's old age. In the May letter also, Swamiji makes a comparison between Haridas and 'the Diwans of nearly all the states in Dakshin', and says, 'The Lord be my witness how my tongue was fluent in your praise (although I know that my powers are quite inadequate to estimate your noble qualities) in every southern court.' Obviously, in his comparison the scales tipped decisively towards the dewan of Junagadh. This had made his love for the dewan 'increase a hundred fold'. And in the end Swamiji implores him 'to pardon me as a father pardons a son'.

The native states of Saurashtra were full of intrigues, and Haridas seems to have fallen prey to some such guile. In his letter of 22 May 1893 from Bombay, Swamiji has words of encouragement for Haridas: 'Underlying everything, there is an infinite basis of goodness and love. ... I thoroughly believe that a good, unselfish and holy man like you, whose whole life has been devoted to doing good to others, has already reached this basis of firmness which the Lord Himself has styled as "rest upon Brahman" in the Gita.' He ends his letter with a prayer for the dewan.

Letters from America

The ninth letter of Swamiji to 'Diwanji Saheb' is written from Chicago, after a lapse of over five and a half months, on 15 November 1893, two months

after he first addressed the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. From an unknown, inconspicuous wandering monk, Swamiji had been transformed into the brilliant sun whose bright light started illuminating the cultured world.³

This letter is in reply to a letter from the dewan. Though the dewan was carrying on his head the burdens of governing the biggest native state of Saurashtra, he had the concern and care to write to Swamiji. Swamiji assures Haridas that 'The Sannyasin has not lost a bit of his Sannyasinship, even his mode of living. ... The Lord who guides me in India, would He not guide me here? And He has.' Swamiji explains at some length the purpose of his visit to America, and says, 'I am neither a sightseer nor an idle traveller; but you will see, if you live to see, and bless me all your life.' Then he mentions about his speaking at the Parliament of Religions and quotes from a couple of journals the praises that had been showered upon him.

'I am the same here as in India, only here in this highly cultural land there is an appreciation, a sympathy which our ignorant fools never dream of. ...

'I am ashamed of my own nation when I compare their beggarly, selfish, ignorant ungratefulness with the help, hospitality, sympathy, and respect which the Americans have shown to me, a representative of a foreign religion.' Lastly, he cautions Haridas, 'Please do not publish it.'

The tenth letter of Swamiji to 'Diwanji Sahab' is written from Chicago on 29 January 1894. 'You have touched the only soft place in my heart', that is how Swamiji practically begins his letter. The reason? Haridas had visited Swamiji's home in Kolkata and, being moved by the pitiable condition in which Swamiji's mother and brothers were living, must have expressed his disapproval at Swamiji's sannyasa and indicated that he had neglected his duty towards his family. Swamiji's reply brings out the Nachiketa in him—choosing the path of *śreyas* and rejecting *preyas*. Swamiji admits, it was his choice to sacrifice the happiness of a few people—his mother and brothers—for the good of the whole world. He writes, 'I am no hard-hearted

brute. If there is any being I love in the whole world, it is my mother. Yet I believed and still believe that without my giving up the world, the great mission which Ramakrishna Paramahansa, my great master came to preach would not see the light.' He writes with a heart of steel, 'But appreciation or no appreciation, I am born to organize these young men; nay, hundreds more in every city are ready to join me; and I want to send them rolling like irresistible waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most downtrodden. And this I will do or die.'

'Do or die' were the very words that Mahatma Gandhi was to use on 8 August 1942, speaking at the Govalia Tank Maidan, Bombay. Gandhiji would inherit his resoluteness, dedication, and love for the country and for truth from Swamiji.

The dewan must have raised an objection to the worship of the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna at the Math; Swamiji cogently and persuasively upholds this practice, explaining it at some length from different perspectives. He puts down in black and white a fundamental principle on which the edifice of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was going to be erected: 'We do not only tolerate but accept every religion.'

Towards the end of the letter, he points out one of the reasons for the downfall of the Hindus: '*Jealousy*. Never were there people more wretchedly jealous of one another' than the Hindus; and he laments: 'Lord! When will we learn not to be jealous!' He concludes: 'You are one of the few noble natures who stand as rocks out of water in this sea of universal stagnation. Lord bless you for ever and ever!'

Swamiji's next letter, dated 20 June 1894, is written from 541 Dearborn Avenue, Chicago—the Hale residence. The beginning of this letter refers to another letter of his to 'Diwanji Sahab'—perhaps the letter of 29 January—which 'could have caused pain to such a noble heart as yours with my rash and strong words. I bow down to your mild corrections. "Thy son am I, teach me thus bowing"—Gita.'

This letter, stretching over more than four and a half printed pages, lays bare Swamiji's personality and reveals his grand vision. Within ten months of his stay in the US, Swamiji had been able to observe the striking differences between the West and the East, India in particular. The English, Swamiji observes, were easily able to conquer India, 'because they are a nation, we are not'. Even today—seeing the thinking and acting on linguistic, regional, or communal lines, as most of us do—one doubts if we 'are a nation'. He has no regard for the reformers of the period, who busy themselves with questions of widow remarriage and idol worship. 'The real nation who live in cottage[s] have forgotten their manhood, their individuality. ... They are to be given back their lost individuality. They are to be educated.'

If the dewan were able to come back today, his heart would be filled with great joy to see Swamiji's prophetic vision coming true: 'Now do you not think you have already seen the nucleus of a great movement, that you have heard the low rumblings of the coming tidal wave? That centre, that God-man to lead was born in India. He was the great Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and round him this band is slowly gathering.' One may say that this band has now become an army, with more than 150 'forts'—centres—around the globe.

Swamiji also mentions the spanners in his works: 'The missionaries and the Brahmo Samajists try to thwart all my views.' But what seems to hurt him most is the fact that 'a year has rolled by, and our countrymen could not even do so much for me as to say to the American people that I was a real Sannyasin and no cheat, and that I represented the Hindu religion.' The dewan is 'one of the few who really feel for me, have real kindness for me,' says Swamiji. He unburdens himself before the dewan as he does before no one else.

Haridas must have written a letter conveying his own gratitude and the gratitude of the whole country to Mr G W Hale for all the kindness and affection the Hale family had showered upon Swamiji. Swamiji's letter of September 1894, from Chicago,

appreciates this graceful act of the dewan.

Letter no. XXXIV, from Chicago and dated *November (?) 1894*, starts on a very cheerful note: 'Your letter pleased me extremely. I, of course, understand the joke, but I am not the baby to be put off with a joke.' This shows the intimacy of the relationship between the two.

While mentioning Virchand Gandhi's good work in America and its appreciation there, Swamiji also draws Haridas's attention to the fact that the people (the Jains of India) who sent him over 'are trying to outcaste him. Jealousy is a vice necessarily generated in slaves. Again it is jealousy that holds them down.' There were also people in the US who were jealous of Swamiji's success. He describes how some of these 'jealous' men 'were all trying to lecture and get money thereby. They did something, but I succeeded better than they—why, I did not put myself as a bar to their success. It was the will of the Lord. But all these ... except ... have fabricated and circulated the most horrible lies about me in this country, and behind my back.'

Swamiji then delves into our history and movingly asks, 'Where, in what period of history your rich men, noblemen, your priests and potentates took any thought for the poor—the grinding of whose faces is the very life-blood of their power?' After pointing out the vengeance of history in a very touching manner, Swamiji pinpoints the reason why a large section of the Indian population was converted to Islam: 'It is nonsense to say, they were converted by the sword. It was to gain their liberty from the ... zemindars and from the ... priest, and as a consequence you find in Bengal there are more Mohammedans than Hindus amongst the cultivators, because there were so many zemindars there. Who thinks of raising these sunken down-trodden millions?'

Before concluding, Swamiji reveals his high estimate of the dewan, imploring him to 'pray with me, you—one of the few that have real sympathy for everything good, for everything great, one at least whom I know to be a man of true ring, nobility of nature, and a thorough sincerity of head and heart.'

These words of Swamiji clearly show his penetrating insight into the character of a person with whom he had stayed for but a few days.

Swamiji's last words written to his dear friend in this his last letter to him exemplify his message to humanity, and his benedictions for all: 'The only way is love and sympathy. The only worship is love.

'May He help you and yours ever and ever!

'With prayers and blessings, Vivekananda.'

Conclusion

Though we have only one side of a mutual correspondence, yet it reveals the personalities of both the writer and the receiver of the letters and the affectionate relationship between them. Swamiji did not need to learn from Carnegie 'how to win friends'; he was born with this talent. Swamiji had a very wide circle of friends—his published correspondence is addressed to more than a hundred persons—and the common factor binding him with all of them is love: love, flowing from the spiritual heights he had attained. This love takes different forms with different persons. To Christine Greenstidel, he writes as a father, to Sister Nivedita he is a guru, and to Haridas Desai he writes as a son. As for Haridas, he was not merely an administrator, steeped only in statecraft. He was honest to the core: he had refused to accept a sum of a lakh of rupees offered by the Nawab of Junagadh as reward for his exemplary service; he possessed sound judgement, he could see far ahead of his time, and was catholic enough to shower his affection on Swamiji, whose worth he had been able to recognize. Haridas did not merely offer food and blanket to the wandering sannyasin, and bid him goodbye. He entered into a lifelong relationship instead. The depth of this relationship is reflected in his calling on Swamiji's family during his visit to Calcutta, and his admonishing Swamiji for taking sannyasa, leaving his family in straitened circumstances.

Swamiji was a lover of humanity. The true sannyasin that he was, he had perfectly mastered the art of loving people without attachment. He never de-

sired any personal benefit from his relationships.

Swami Vivekananda and Haridas Viharidas Desai were two noble souls brought together by destiny. These letters of Swamiji bring out the greatness of the two personalities, each towering in his own way.



References

All quotations are taken from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), Volume 8.

1. As listed in *Complete Works*, vol. 9, Appendix I.
2. This letter, numbered XXX, is incorrectly dated in the *Complete Works*. See, His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), 1.291-2.
3. This letter, numbered XXXIII in the *Complete Works*, is given the date 15 November 1894 (with a 'three' and a question mark in brackets); the contents of the letter clearly indicate the earlier date. Marie Louise Burke also supports the 1893 date. See, Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992), 1.187.

Oh, Mother, my heart is so, so sad. The letters bring the news of the death of Dewanji. Haridas Viharidas has left the body. He was as a father to me. Poor man, he was the last 5 years seeking the retirement from business life, and at last he got it but could not enjoy it long. I pray that he may never come back again to this dirty hole they call the Earth. Neither may he be born in heaven or any other horrid place. May he never again wear a body—good or bad, thick or thin. What a humbug and illusion this world is, Mother, what a mockery this life. I pray constantly that all mankind will come to know the reality, i.e. God, and this 'Shop' here be closed for ever.

My heart is too full to write more. Write to me or wire if you like.

Your ever obedient Son,
Vivekananda

(Swami Vivekananda to Mrs G W Hale on 30 July 1895, from Thousand Island Park, New York)

Swami Vivekananda on the Economic Plight of India

Dr Gordon R Stavig

SWAMI Vivekananda was a guest for five days (20–24 August 1893) at the home of the American writer Kate Sanborn (1839–1917) in Breezy Meadows, Massachusetts. Miss Sanborn wanted her cousin Franklin to meet Vivekananda. In reply, Mr Sanborn wrote back to her, ‘a real Hindu devotee is an interesting study but I am too old to be cheated by the esoteric Buddhists [Theosophists]!’ After they got together, Franklin Sanborn was so impressed by the swami that he invited



Kate Sanborn

him to be his guest in Saratoga, New York.¹ He encouraged Vivekananda to deliver several discourses before the prestigious American Social Science Association, which was founded by Sanborn, who served as its general secretary. The organization concentrated on the practical ap-

plications rather than the theoretical aspects of social science. The general meeting of the Association was held at the new town hall in Saratoga during 4–8 September, 1893.²

As a young man, Franklin Sanborn (1831–1917) was a good friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other Transcendentalists. In 1854, he married a young lady who was on her deathbed and succumbed eight days later. Franklin Sanborn ardently opposed slavery, and belonged to the ‘secret six,’ who knew in advance about John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. When the federal deputies came to get Sanborn, Ralph Wal-

do Emerson (1803–82) headed a group of citizens that drove the deputies out of town. Sanborn was a newspaper editor for some years. He worked hard and successfully in his humanitarian endeavours as the founder and an officer of the American



Franklin Sanborn

Social Science Association, National Prison Association, National Conference of Charities, Clarke School for the Deaf, and Massachusetts Infant Asylum; and as a cofounder of the Concord School of Philosophy. The Governor appointed him to be the chairman of the State Board of Charities in 1874–6 and 1879–88. Being one of the last of the great American Transcendentalists, Sanborn was the chief biographer of his intimate friends of whom he had first hand knowledge. After 1878, he produced highly original books on Henry D Thoreau, John Brown, Dr S G Howe (husband of Julia Ward Howe), Amos Bronson Alcott, Pliny Earle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.³

At the American Social Science Association convention held in Saratoga, four departments held sessions each day as follows: Department of Education (Tuesday, 5 September), Department of Finance (6 September), Department of Jurisprudence (7 September), and the Department of Social Economy (8 September). Swamiji spoke on ‘The Mohammedan Rule in India’ (evening of 5 September). The next day Elisha Benjamin Andrews (1844–1917), the dynamic president of Brown University, read a paper on ‘The Silver Question in India.’ (Three or four

years later Swami Saradananda lectured at the Philosophical Club at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.) According to the Daily Saratogian of 7 September, 'At the conclusion of the reading Vive Kananda, the Hindoo monk addressed the audience in an intelligent and interesting manner, taking for his subject the use of silver in India.' The Swami also gave a third talk that evening.⁴

On Friday, 8 September, 1893, Franklin Sanborn, the Chairman of the Department of Social Economy, made the opening speech. Over three months later, an account of Swami Vivekananda's candid remarks, made that day around 11.30 a.m., was written for the *Journal of Social Science*.

Since Franklin Sanborn was also the editor of this journal, it is likely that he wrote the piece, which is reproduced on the following page.⁵ Even before the Parliament of Religions commenced, Swami Vivekananda was already impressing Americans with his gift for public speaking. Concerning the events at the convention, the *New York Times* of 10 September 1893, p 10 mentioned:

Saratoga, N. Y., Sept. 9.— ... The meetings of the Social Science Association have been a considerable factor in the week's excitement, attracting a large and representative gathering of persons at every session. A most picturesque figure at these meetings has been the Hindu priest (Swami Vive Kananda,) who has spoken at several of them upon the deplorable condition of the poor of India and some of the causes which bring it about. In his preaching he has traversed almost every square mile of the great empire, and in his capacity of monk he has entered the homes and studied the lives of the poor people of his race as is not given to even every native.

He is eloquent with the distress and wrongs of his kind. He speaks most fluent and musical English, and is a master of a natural and dramatic oratory that is most persuasive. On Thursday [September 7] afternoon in the drawing room of the United States Hotel he gave an informal talk,

and in his habit of orange cloth which, girded about the waist, is monkish only in cut, and his turban of orange stuff wound about his fine head with a grace that would be the despair of a coiffeur, his dark, chiselled face, with the expression of sadness that is usually seen in the Oriental, he made a marked personality in striking contrast to the conventional Westerners who surrounded him. He left to-day [September 9] for Chicago to attend the Congress [Parliament] of Religions.

Upon leaving Saratoga, Swamiji travelled over 800 miles by train to Chicago. The following year Swamiji and Franklin Sanborn were guest speakers at the Greenacre Conference, and then travelled together to Plymouth, Massachusetts for the meeting of the Free Religious Association in August of

1894.⁶



Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.449-50.
2. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), 1.26-7, 52-3, 55; 'September Days at the Spa', *New York Times* (10 September 1893), 10. According to the *New York Times*, Swamiji left Saratoga on 9 September. If so, he would have arrived in Chicago on the 10th, one day before the start of the Parliament of Religions. But we know he spent one night in a boxcar (goods-wagon) in Chicago before meeting Mrs Hale. Further research is needed to confirm if the *Times* reporter was mistaken, and Swamiji left Saratoga on the 8th, arriving in Chicago on the 9th.
3. *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 16.326-27; *Contemporary Authors* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2002), 201.378-80; 'Franklin B. Sanborn Papers', <<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/cl229.htm>> accessed 20 December 2006.
4. *New Discoveries*, 1.55-8; *Journal of Social Science*, 31 (Jan. 1894), v-vi.
5. 'Debate in the Social Economy Department', *Journal of Social Science*, 31 (Jan. 1894), 69-70.
6. *New Discoveries*, 2.138, 160, 162.

DEBATE IN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY DEPARTMENT.

The papers of this Department were briefly discussed by the members present; but no report was made of the debates, except in the case of a Brahman monk from Madras, who was invited by the chairman to speak of the criticism made by the Rev. S. Barnett on the poverty and public charity of British India. Vive Kananda, the monk mentioned,—who was on his way to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he afterward spoke acceptably on the religion of his nation, being introduced by the chairman, said that the poverty of the people of India could scarcely be exaggerated, and had not been overdrawn by Mr. Barnett; nor was he at fault in criticising the measures of the government, by which the poor were overtaxed. The introduction of British manufactures into India had produced the sad effect of destroying in a great degree the native hand-manufactures; and by this the people were thrown back on agriculture for a subsistence, in circumstances that made it practically impossible to support themselves abundantly. Many of them had but one meal a day, and that of very bad quality oftentimes. The native princes, as a rule, did little to improve this condition; and the English government, though better than formerly in this respect, also took too little care of 280,000,000 of their poorest subjects. What was needed was instruction in modern industries and better modes of living; and his own errand in America was to learn from a people so practical lessons in these matters which he could impart to his people on his return. His life as a monk led him into all parts of India, and he had seen with his own eyes the wretched state of the people. Education was given to the rich, but very seldom to the poor; and such was the incessant toil of their days that they had little time or strength for anything but the supply of their physical wants in the plainest manner. Spiritually, they were well taught by their priests and monks; but, practically, they need to learn much. The fall in silver had rather benefited than injured the poor; for it had reduced the importation of British manufactures, and given a little more variety to the industries of India. The condition of women in India did not appear to him so bad as the missionaries sometimes describe it. The burning of widows has long been forbidden by English law; yet many widows still commit suicide in other ways, on the death of their husbands, not being allowed to remarry, and finding life hard and poor. The practice of medicine is now common among the native Indians, but the poor could not profit much by that on account of their poverty.*

* Vive Kananda had previously spoken in the debate on the Silver Question, in the Finance Department, and was heard on both occasions with great attention, contributing much to the interest of the two meetings which he attended. He still (December 20) remains in the United States, though his countryman, P. C. Mozoomdar, who spoke at our Saratoga Meeting of 1883, and again visited America this year, has returned to India.

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PAPERS ON AGRI-CULTURE, THE SILVER
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ETC.
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GENERAL MEETING OF 1893.

The General Meeting of 1893 was held at the new Town Hall in Saratoga, beginning Monday, September 4, and closing Friday, September 8.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8.

Department of Social Economy.

- 9.30 A.M. Address by the Chairman of the Department, F. B. Sanborn.
10.00 A.M. A Paper on "The Mutual Benefit Societies of Connecticut," by S. M. Hotchkiss, Esq., of Hartford, Ct.
11.00 A.M. A Report from the Department on "Results of Legislation concerning the Sweating System."
11.30 A.M. Remarks by VIVE KANANDA, of Madras, and others, on the preceding Papers.

SEPTEMBER DAYS AT THE SPA

MANY PLEASURE SEEKERS STILL
REMAIN IN SARATOGA.

Visit of the Arion Society on Its Way Home from Montreal—The Russian Minister and His Party Entertained by Judge Hilton—The Handsome Stables of the Woodlawn Stock Farm—A Miniature Horse Show—Meetings of the Social Science Association.

SARATOGA, N. Y., Sept. 9.—The gay season at this resort never, but the present season for leisure, going down the Hudson by day, night or a view of the American Rhine. The meetings of the Social Science Association have been a considerable factor in the week's excitement, attracting a large and representative gathering of persons at every session. A most picturesque figure at these meetings has been the Hindu priest, (Swami Vive Kananda,) who has spoken at several of them upon the deplorable condition of the poor of India and some of the causes which bring it about. In his preaching he has traversed almost every square mile of the great empire, and in his capacity of monk he has entered the homes and studied the lives of the poor people of his race as is not given to even every native. He is eloquent with the dactyl and wrongs of his kind. He speaks most fluent and musical English, and is master of a natural and dramatic oratory that is most persuasive. On Thursday afternoon in the drawing room of the United States Hotel he gave an informal talk, and in his habit of orange cloth which, girded about the waist, is monkish only in cut, and his turban of orange stuff wound about his head with a grace that would be the despair of a colporteur, his dark, chiseled face, with the expression of sadness that is usually seen in the Oriental, he made a marked personality in striking contrast to the conventional Westerners who surrounded him. He left to-day for Chicago to attend the Congress of Religions.

Left: Reproduction of pages 69–70 of the January 1894 issue of the Journal of Social Science.

Top: Cover, and clippings of pages v and vi from the same issue.

Above: Clipping from the New York Times, 10 September 1893.

Unfolding Youthful Energies

Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam Youth Day Competitions

A MONK visited a jail to preach to the inmates. He spoke to them touchingly about character, service, prayer, dependence on God, and such other values. A long-term convict suddenly stood up and asked, 'Why did you not tell us all this when we were young? What is the use of preaching to us now, when we have lost all hope of living like normal human beings?' The convict's words moved the monk deeply. This was not just another imaginary story. It contained a tough poser that sought an answer from one's conscience.

Vijayam's readers include the young and the old, students, professionals, as well as pensioners. The readership ranges from the devout and the regular to the casual and the curious. The student community is its special focus. The circulation among students presently stands at 42,000.

The YDC primarily aims to elicit from the student community genuine responses to many essential questions of life—questions which many parents hardly ever ask them. Students and parents are often caught up in the mad competitive rush of contempo-

It was this moving outburst that sowed the seeds of the Youth Day Competition (YDC) conducted by *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the widely-read Tamil spiritual monthly of the Ramakrishna Order.

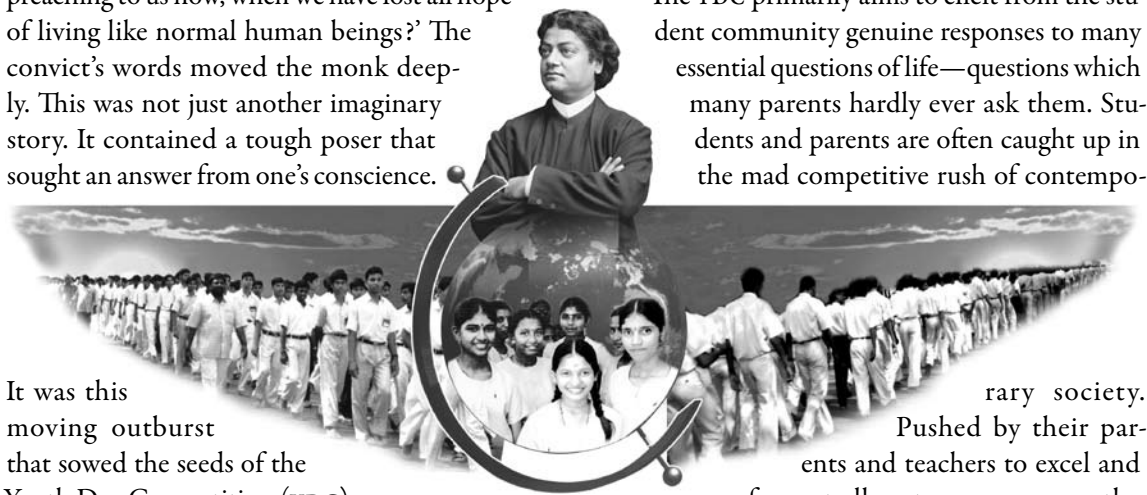
The Beginning

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has been publishing *Vijayam* for over eighty-six years now. The publication has a large and discerning readership both in India and abroad. It provides thoughtful and well-researched articles in a simple and readable format, thus helping readers fulfil their aspirations for spiritual growth and self-development. Articles range from the esoteric to the humorous, thus catering to a wide variety of spiritual tastes. The magazine has a current monthly print of 95,000 copies and a much larger readership.

rary society. Pushed by their parents and teachers to excel and perform at all costs, many among the youth seem to be confused about their priorities in life. It is against this background that we decided to engage the youth with Swami Vivekananda's invigorating ideas through the YDC. We found the answers received from the students to our posers to be very sincere and refreshing, often exemplary, and most important, thought provoking.

Remembering the Visionary Monk

Twelve January, Swami Vivekananda's birthday, is celebrated all over India as National Youth Day. The YDC is, in fact, but one component of these annual celebrations in memory of the monk with a clear vision who reminds us that we are citizens of a tolerant, non-violent, progressive, and caring nation with a deep-rooted cultural heritage that



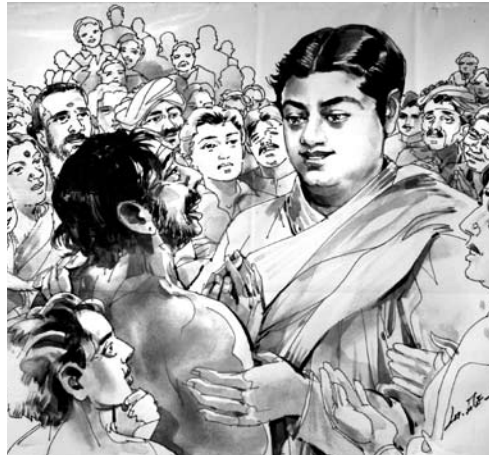
can benefit the whole of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda's message about the universality of all religions and the need for inter-faith initiatives among world communities also finds expression in the YDC. This is amply corroborated by the participation of students from diverse religious backgrounds.

Youth is the time when the dream of a good and glorious life can find genuine expression and the heart can achieve all its dreams through its unlimited reserves of energy and enthusiasm. It would not be wrong to say that it is due to a lack of such character-building inputs as honesty and integrity in the present educational system that many in society who ought to be behind prison bars are roaming around freely as viruses in the community, thus slowing down the nation's onward march towards enlightenment and emancipation.

The educational system in our country is not geared to fostering in the students such core faculties as fearlessness, courage, self-confidence, the spirit of selfless service, and patriotism. At best, these are imparted through elders in the family or by the personal examples of parents themselves. Swami Vivekananda defines the fine-tuning of these essential qualities as the core of a 'man-making education', which is much needed in our country. The YDC aims at calling the attention of educationists, parents, and the youth themselves to bringing about a robust change in the national mindset.

In one of the contest entries, one student remarked, 'Never say that the youth are useless. We are only used less.' This was a statement straight from the heart. The youth of today have a remarkably high level of motivation. They can detect sham and insincerity from miles away. But they are certainly willing to accept guidance and direction



'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God.'
—Swami Vivekananda

from leaders and teachers of stature, and from any elder who is sincere and upright. YDC aims at giving direction and impetus to these healthy youthful energies. Indirectly, it also conveys a subtle message to the cross-section of erring elders in our society, to mend their ways before it is too late.

Some Salient Features

- 68,000 students from over 800 schools and colleges participated in the 4th YDC, which concluded on 12 January 2006. This was over six times the number of participants in 2003. The increase in numbers reflects not only the popularity of the contest but also the vibrant and bubbly mood of the participants.
- The contest has attracted responses not only in the regional language of Tamil, but also in English, Sanskrit, Malayalam, Telugu, and Hindi.
- The Tamil Nadu State Education Department has, every year, issued a circular to all the corporation schools to extend full support to this programme.
- During a prize distribution function at Sivakasi on 30 January 2006, about 3,700 students from 34 schools took an oath to the following effect: 'We are all God's children. As God's children, we are all brothers and sisters. Godly qualities like love, patience, and purity are our inherent natural traits. We will always try to live with these natural godly qualities and make our teachers and parents and God proud of us.'
- S Kritika, one of the students who participated in the contest of 2005, referring to the scheme of providing nutritional food to school children launched by the State Government, observed, 'Swamiji's *ideas* are the true nutritional food for children.'
- Two of the prize-winning girls and boys fearlessly spoke their minds at a function. These speeches were broadcast over AIR, Chennai, the same



Judges at their task
evening.

- The responses of the students and youth inform us that though they may belong to multifarious strata of society, the one common language that they all understand is the language of selfless work, love, sincerity, and compassion.
- This competition may have changed some lives, enlightened many, and even entertained a few. But most importantly, these programmes have introduced Swami Vivekananda and his noble character-building thoughts to innumerable youth who are

C Kannadasan: What is the use of conducting the YDC contests through *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*?

Vijayam: The first visible signs are attitudinal changes and a positive awareness about the country's welfare and the society's welfare in the minds of many. For example, M Gautam, a student, wrote this on religious intolerance: 'All Gods are one. If we understand this, then there is no scope for religious quarrels. Hindus should pray in the mosques, Muslims in churches, and Christians in temples. If this is done, then we will understand that God is common to all. But society will not accept this solution of a small boy like me. Just as all of us study in the school together and feel like brothers and sisters inside the classrooms, if people of all religious denominations pray together, then society and individuals will benefit, and see better and happier days. Doing this and motivating others to do it, is certainly in the hands of us youngsters.'

—*Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, July 2006.

all sure to be blessed and guided by him.

The Judge's Task

After deciding upon the core theme of a contest, strategies for step-by-step implementation are decided at a brainstorming session where volunteers from all districts of Tamil Nadu assemble to offer their suggestions regarding constructive field-level implementation of the programme.

A team of eminent teachers and volunteers carefully examines all the entries, once they are received. The editor of the magazine serves as the chief coordinator and moderator at such meetings. The judges keep in mind the spirit of the contest in the following areas: (i) Swamiji asked for a hundred capable youth for him to revolutionize the world. Look out, so as to find at least one of those hundred among these youngsters; (ii) See whether their views are rich in ideas; (iii) See whether they follow their suggestions themselves in their own lives; (iv) See whether they are service-minded, whether they have understood the foibles and shortcomings of society, and whether they have the mental maturity to stand up against atrocities and fight against odds in a constructive way.

The judges do not merely admire the submissions superficially, but try to see into the hearts of the contestants through their answers. The answer papers of children and youth who come from less privileged backgrounds and who have lagged behind in getting the full support of society are given a closer scrutiny than the answer papers of those who have plenty of opportunities to excel in life, to judge their spirit and qualities of heart and pick out the winners. The task is obviously onerous, but the judges usually have an interesting time evaluating the entries. More often than not, this process is an education for the judges themselves.

What They Felt

The prize-distribution programmes for this contest are held at various places in Chennai and the different districts of Tamil Nadu. At one of the prize-distribution functions, a speaker said, 'This com-

petition is an attempt to make each student reach up to his own competence and capability level and bear the responsibilities of family, school, and society. This mammoth crowd seen here is a reflection of the success of this attempt, which has been achieved by the blessings of Swamiji.'



Rashmi Gautam

Rashmi Gautam, a college student, received a thunderous applause as she summed up the mantra of success in her resonant voice: 'An achievement is not accomplished of itself. Hard work is required to back up an achievement. And imagination too is essential for this. We can become achievers only when our dreams get a tangible shape. Today's youngsters must strive to realize their dream of helping in the onward progress of our motherland.'



P Narayanan receives award

P Narayanan remarked, 'Swami Vivekananda has said that education is not for mere economic success in life; it is to teach us how to live our life. We students must always remember that.' Narayanan did not stop with mere preaching; he decided to use the cash prize of Rs 3,000, which he had won, for the educational expenses of an indigent friend.

Radhika Vidyasagar, a teacher, observed, 'For society to reform, humanity should improve. For humanity to improve, the students should inculcate good habits and culture. For the youth to excel, their mind should develop concentration and go in the right path. And for them to go in the right path, we should sow the seeds of spirituality in them.'

Highlights

We shall now take a summary look back at the YDC programmes, beginning with 2006. The extracts reflect the youthful vision of the participants as well as their grit and determination to win against

all odds.

YDC 2006: Be and Make

The questions to which the contestants were asked to respond creatively were: (i) What do you do for the welfare of your *home*? (ii) What do you do for the progress of your *school*? (iii) What do you do for the glory of your *society*?

Swami Gautamananda, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, distributed the awards to the winners at a function held at the Math premises on 12 January 2006. Of the 68,159 students from 800 schools and colleges who participated in this contest, 19 received cash prizes, 1,200 students received encouragement prizes of Rs 100 each, and merit certificates were awarded to 6,000 students. The efforts of 650 schools were recognized through awards, and special prizes were given to 41 schools. It is worth noting that two of the students who got first prizes were physically challenged.



A Prize-distribution program

As the number of participants in the contest was large, and because there was equal participation by city students as well as students from remote villages, the prize distribution function was decentralized to ensure maximum attendance and register greater local participation. Besides the main function and a few smaller functions at other centres at Chennai, prize-distribution functions were also held in Madurai (12 January), Kanchipuram (23 January), Neyveli (30 January), Sivakasi (30 January), and Chidambaram (4 January). All of these were well attended.

Swami Vimurtananda, Editor, *Sri Ramakrishna*

Vijayam summed up the essence of the programme at the Kanchipuram function: 'A mosquito can carry blood weighing twice its own body weight in its gut, and can still fly. An ant can drag a morsel of food weighing six times its body weight. But man forgets his strength and simply carries his weight around. He even does not hesitate to make others carry his weight. This competition titled "Be and Make" is an effort to change this situation.' He also clarified the process: 'Dear students, if you have a happy household, your mind will be happy. With a happy and calm mind, your health will improve. When your future is secure you will want to make others also happy, and you will begin to help others. That attitude will make you noble and great!'

What They Said

Many of the ideas emerging from students revealed keen insight and an indomitable spirit. Their enthusiasm and impatience for doing good deeds were also strikingly apparent, if not contagious.

For the welfare of one's family

A student: 'When I was born, my parents sacrificed much to bring me up. When I grow old, I will never send them away to an old-age home.'

V Pavitra, one of the prize winners observed: 'A son, to make all the sacrifices of his parents meaningful, can excel in studies, excel in sports, or excel in arts. But if he has bad habits and a weak character, all his achievements are in vain.'



U Gayatri

U Gayatri sounded an optimistic note: 'You have to dive into the water to get pearls. Life is a battlefield, and both victory and defeat are inevitable. But I will fight till the end without losing heart.'

According to S Arulshakti Murugan, 'A mother like mine, who has sacrificed her pleasures, happiness, sleep, health, everything is, I am sure, verily God. My mission in life is to make my mother's sacrifices meaningful.'

No limitation could possibly handicap R Arun



S A Murugan



R Arun Prakash receives award

Prakash: 'I am deaf, and I can't speak. When my mother would train me to communicate, she would shed tears. I would with my sign language ask her not to cry. I want to achieve something in life and remove the worries of my parents. For that, I am training myself in perseverance, love, self confidence, and enthusiasm.'

For the progress of one's school

'Before the teacher comes to the class, I write the day's topic on the blackboard. I give tips on the subject, whatever I know of it, to the students. I keep them cheerful during the interval by telling them jokes. At the end of the class, I suggest asking questions to the teacher on areas which need clarification,' wrote a class monitor.

According to K Madana Kumar, 'If you persevere, you can pluck jasmine flowers even from the sharp edge of a thorn; you can generate electricity even from an oasis; you can move the globe even with your index finger. These precepts guide me to strive for earning a name for my school.'

R Vivekapriya: "Each child of mine should be a hundred times more bold and greater than me. They should do what I could not. That is my dream," said Swami Vivekananda. The only way to build up such youth is to inject Vivekananda into them. As antibiotics injected into the system kill all germs, the "V antibiotic" will kill our laziness and fear, and give us courage and conviction to come out successful.'

P Deepa: 'Giving us training in Indian culture, arming us with the sword of self-confidence, smearing the sandal paste mark or *kum-kum* (bindi) of character on our forehead, the teacher makes us enter the world, which is our battlefield, and crowns us with glory every day.' She adds,



K Madana Kumar



P Deepa

'My teacher once told me that when a teacher beats a student to correct him, he himself feels fifty per cent of that pain. The medicine which a teacher gives may be bitter, but it can cure the deadliest of diseases.'

S Sahana: 'I am handicapped from birth. One of my eyes has no vision and the other eye has only ten per cent vision. I can't see what my teacher writes on the blackboard. I hear what he says and with the help of my teacher and parents, I hold the first rank in my class. Looking at me, there is a healthy competition among my classmates, who are in full possession of their faculties, to perform better than me in class.'



S Sahana

For the glory of society

M Pravin asserted: 'If someone desecrates or litters places of worship like temples and mosques, I will lash them with the question, "Would you dare to do this in the drawing room of your house?"' Further: 'Every year, my brother and I give books and clothes in good condition to the nearby orphanage for use by the children there. We have decided to spend our birthdays with those poor and destitute children, feeding them on that day and eating with them.'

U Gayatri spoke for social justice: 'I will fight for equal rights for men and women. I will eradicate the system of dowry. I will help the blind, the handicapped, and the unfortunate in the best way that I can. I will not shut my eyes to injustice, atrocities, and stealing.'

V Sujita emphasized the power of positive beliefs: 'Believe! Believe that the nation will prosper. Our homes will prosper. The society will change for the better. Believe that the huts will become mansions. People will become kind, noble, and non-violent. Education will be available for every individual. Believe that caste feelings and the ills plaguing society will vanish. If we can believe this, surely it will happen.' Moreover, 'When you press down a ball filled with air under water, it will surely come up again. So too the youngsters of today are filled with the spirit of nationalism and skilled in various tasks. Such talent and spirit cannot be put down for long. They are bound to surge up and build a better world.'

'I am, even now, dreaming of serving society, helping people, making a mark for myself, and being the bold modern woman visualized by the great Tamil poet Bharatiyar. I dream these all the while, though remaining quite awake,' declared P Deepa.

(To be concluded)

Some Lighter Interludes

Many of the participants contributed anecdotes, poems, and quotations from literary works, all in a lighter vein. Some of the humorous embellishments were intentional while others were not.

- To a question, 'What is your goal in life?' one student replied, 'My goal is to become intelligent.' An intelligent though unconventional choice!
- 'If my father and mother start fighting, I won't bother to interfere and try to bring peace between them. I will leave them to their fate and just go to my grandmother,' said a young girl, with obvious practical determination and perspicacity.
- A girl from Kumbakonam, where a tragic fire accident in a thatched-roof schoolroom had killed many children,

said, 'Whether I become a killer in the country or a pillar of the country will solely depend upon me.'

- During the 2004 contest, the participants were asked to buy flowers for their mothers out of their 'pocket money'. Perhaps it was presumptuous on the part of the organizers to think that each and every child would be getting pocket money from his or her parents. One youngster wrote revealingly, 'I took money out of the coat pocket of my father and bought flowers for my mother.'
- 'In crossing life's hurdles, my mother is Anju George; in running from home to office, she is P T Usha; in lifting up the responsibilities of the home, she is Malleshwari. Each day makes her an Olympian!' so said a student from Chennai, who clearly has Olympic leanings!

On Ethics, Education, and Swami Vivekananda

Prof. Bharati Ganguli

PHILOSOPHERS trying to define fully the two sets of opposites—good and bad, right and wrong—are almost always forced to admit failure. These moral issues are influenced by diverse factors like subjectivity, relativity, place, time, and circumstance, and their definitions tend to become nebulous and circular. So, most of the time philosophers end up producing labyrinths out of which it is difficult to find a way. Nevertheless, some positive breakthroughs have been effected in this area.

In his major work on ethics, *Principia Ethica* (1903), Moore points out that the main question of ethics is ‘What constitutes good?’ But how the word *good* is to be defined can hardly be answered in terms of pure reason and objectivity. An answer, or rather an apology for one, is: ‘Good is good’ or ‘Good is not definable’. It is unanalysable, being a unique and simple object of thought. However, ethics—the philosophical study of morality—can be divided into the general study of goodness, the general study of right action, applied ethics, meta-ethics, moral psychology, the metaphysics of moral responsibility, and so on.

What ends ought we, as fully rational human beings, to choose and attempt to achieve, and what moral rules should regulate our selection and efforts, are the main concerns of ethics. It is interesting to study how these questions are related to the principal structural representations and structural differences among the various systems of ethics. As a matter of fact, the study of structures has come increasingly to the fore in contemporary ethics.

Philosophers have typically treated the question of human ends in one of two ways—either as a question about the components of a good life or as a question about what sorts of things are good in

themselves. Regarding the first, it is assumed that we naturally seek a good life, and hence, determining its components amounts to determining, relative to our desire for such a life, what ends we ought to pursue. Regarding the second, no such assumption of human nature is made; rather it is assumed that whatever is good in itself is worth choosing. The first way of treating the question leads directly to the theory of human well-being and the second to that of intrinsic value.

Nietzsche and Others

Eudaimonism was an important early Greek concept in ethics. The Greek word *eudaimon* is usually translated as ‘happy’, but sometimes also as ‘flourishing’, in order to make the question of human well-being seem more a matter of how well a person is doing than how good he or she is feeling. This gave rise to two views: (i) The view that feeling good or pleasant is the essence of human well-being, and (ii) the view that doing well or excelling at things worth doing is its essence. The first view is hedonism in its classical form. Its chief exponent among the ancients was Epicurus. The second view is perfectionism. Its adherents include Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Among moderns, John Stuart Mill is the best-known defender of classical hedonism and Friedrich Nietzsche of perfectionism.

Nietzsche insisted on the importance of social arrangement and interactions and asserted the possibility of the emergence of exceptional human beings capable of an independence and creativity over and above the general level of humanity. So he stressed the difference between ‘higher men’ and the ‘herd’, and through his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* declared the *ubermensch* (overman or superman)

to be the ideal for excelling the 'all-too-human'. According to him, this ideal lies at the root of the gracious art of life and living. He therefore sought to direct our efforts to the genesis of a higher humanity through the development of cultural life. He distinguished between 'master' and 'slave' moralities and found the latter to have become the dominant type of morality. To him, present-day morality is a herd-animal morality well adjusted to the requirements of the average human, but it does not have any salutary effect on the development of higher potentials. So he regarded the functions of this type of morality as a social control mechanism by which the weak defend themselves against the potentially or actually strong. But Nietzsche suggested the desirability of a higher morality for the exceptions. The strongly creative flavour of his notion of such a 'higher humanity' and the associated higher morality is linked to his idea of art. Art, to him, is essentially creative, meant to prepare human beings for the emergence of a finer sensibility and a manner of life reflecting humanity's highest potential.

Art in Education and Swami Vivekananda

Higher humans, as distinguished from the herd, seek their salvation through the numerous channels of their artistic pursuits. They create their world from the visions they get of the beyond. Art is closely related to goodness. Every art aims at and works for some good. Art alone reveals the infinite, all-attractive power of goodness, the hidden beauty of all things. Everything has a meaning to an artistic eye. And this artistic disposition of mind does not happen in a day. It takes lifelong practice to see beauty, to see an ordinary thing with an extraordinary eye. This finer sensibility takes time to grow in an average person, and it is only gradually that one turns into a genuine artist.

The strongly creative mind does not bind itself to the average impulsions of life, and a time is bound to come when it can no more stop seeing the great and the beautiful even in an ant than it can stop living the worldly, matter-of-fact, commonplace

life. Such people's morality is a finer one—hardly dreamt of by the herd. Unlike the average common folk, they never make random associations; the associations they make are of a closely knit type. Real education refers to this type and quality of the human mind. It is a morality far above the social control device mentioned above. It turns the mind from gross desires towards subtle aspirations, and nudges the overly active mind to admire the reflective intellect.

The great educators of the world are all great artists in this sense; they do not see any evil, rath-

The Indian Conception of Life

This conception of a spiritual evolution with a final spiritual perfection or transcendence of which human life is the means and an often repeated opportunity, is the pivot of the Indian conception of existence. It gives to our life a figure of ascent, in spirals or circles, which has to be filled in with knowledge and action and experience. There is room within it for all human aims, activities and aspirations; there is place in the ascent for all types of human character and nature. The spirit in the world assumes hundreds of forms, follows many tendencies, gives many shapes to his play or *lila*, and all are part of the mass of necessary experience; each has its justification, its law, its reason of being, its utility. The claim of sense satisfaction is not ignored, nor the soul's need of labour and heroic action, nor the hundred forms of the pursuit of knowledge, nor the play of the emotions or the demand of the aesthetic faculties. Indian culture did not deface nor impoverish the richness of the grand game of human life or depress or mutilate the activities of our nature. On the contrary it gave them, subject to a certain principle of harmony and government, their full, often their extreme value; it bade man fathom on his way all experience, fill in life opulently with colour and beauty and enjoyment and give to his character and action a large rein and heroic proportions.

—Sri Aurobindo

er they see the highest good in the meanest thing. This is best illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna, who sees the Divine Mother even in 'the fallen woman'. It is beyond the reach of the common run to understand such infinitely powerful minds. Such people live in this world, but their whole consciousness is beyond the clouds of ordinary existence and remains fixed in the superconscious plane, returning to the mundane world with the light of heaven. The world lives through these great souls, who are indeed a blessing to it. And the more the world learns to take lessons from these great lives, the better for it. They live for others. To them art means nothing short of this living for others. Some of these great ones are messengers of non-attachment and ceaseless unselfish work, some of truth and sacrifice, some of equality. Each messenger has a particular message, and each of them lives the words he or she speaks. Their whole life is a living illustration of their teaching. They never care for theory or science; they perceive and perform. Art before science is the rule they follow.

Education is decidedly an art and realized as such by all great idealist philosophers, ancient and modern. According to Swami Vivekananda, 'the secret of Indian Art is to represent the ideal'.¹ Swamiji is one of the few overmen the world has produced. With his highly developed mind, he not only spearheaded the attack on merely intellectual or theoretical education and on the various defects of the educational system of his time, but also gave us the master key with which to unlock the treasure house of educational resources. The nuggets of insight scattered throughout his speeches and writings provide rich food for thinkers on education. Education has received a new meaning and a fresh impetus from his neo-Vedantism, which is inclusive of both the secular and the spiritual, of current and classical education.

Only great souls like Swamiji, the shining guests of time, are really capable of 'realizing the soul by the soul'—which is, in fact, the essence of education—as described in the *Samadhi Shataka* of the Jinas: '*Nayatyātmānam-ātmaiva, janma-nirvā*

nam-eva vā, nānyaḥ paramārthataḥ; It is the self, and none else in reality, that guides the self—its birth and its extinction.' The soul is its own preceptor, and real education means nothing short of this consciousness, the felt oneness with Brahman, the substratum of all. What is Brahman? If asked, we know nothing; but we do feel it. The Upanishad declares: '*Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*'; Whence words return with the mind, without attaining It.' The Upanishadic seers realized It as '*Satyam jñānam-anantaṁ brahma*'; Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity'. This is what Vedantic education aims to realize. The only sin in human beings is fear, and any action that brings out the latent power of fearlessness that arises from direct knowledge, faith, and natural heroism is *punya*, virtue, and therefore moral. Education aims at the practical realization of these values.

The Futility of Utility

No utilitarian philosophy can supply a rational system of ethics. What is utilitarianism? At bottom it is nothing but crass materialism. No one is such a fool as to live solely for the sake of others' happiness. If there be no higher moral sense or an awareness of a plane of existence higher than that of mere sense enjoyment, why should a person not push his or her way through the crowd and hasten reaching the goal without showing the least concern for others? Most likely the utilitarians themselves would be pushed out of the way! So the utilitarian is ultimately forced to see the power and beauty of goodness, for goodness is much broader and more inclusive than the superficialities of mere utility.

This assumption of a higher ideal, a deeper value, or a broad concern is, therefore, a necessary postulate, or else how can we explain scientifically our innate urge to do and be good? When we think of ourselves as bodies only, we cannot think higher thoughts; and like animals, neither can we consciously do good to others. When we act on the mental plane, we become intellectual and find ourselves in a flux; we are continuously changing and so do not see the full face of sentience. So do-

ing good is still far off. We identify ourselves now with this mental pattern, now with that. The situation often tends to be circular. We can do good only when we are free, conscious of our eternal, unchangeable nature. Only then can we really understand the infinite power and beauty of goodness. Then the highest ethics—goodness for the sake of goodness—becomes achievable.

The theory of utility, when put to the acid test of logic and deliberation, is found to lose ground. A narrow ‘shopkeeping mentality’ cannot lead to love of fellow humans, nor can such a ‘shopkeeper’ do any appreciable good to anybody. For behind every act of seeming goodness, this narrow mentality will be at work. The tartar in us does not allow our real self to work freely. Rather, it projects the false image of illusory goodness. We will never find a rational solution to the problem of good and evil until we conquer the tartar and rise beyond our sense-bound existence in the mundane world.

What Is Good and What Is Bad?

Every person with a pure and simple heart and a mature mind naturally understands what is intrinsically good. He or she recognizes goodness instinctually and always performs good actions. We are reminded of one brief but remarkable sentence from Swami Vivekananda that contains the epitome of all human ethics: ‘It is good to do good.’ And this realization ‘unfolds before us in glorious view the grandeur of the soul, the beauty of goodness, the all attractive power of goodness, the infinite power of goodness’ (4.205).

The idea of good is closely linked with desire. In other words, good must be desired. But every desire is not good in the proper sense of the term. Good means an ideal desire. Let us consider what we mean by ideals. They are, in fact, desired by those who believe in them, but not quite in the same way as someone desires food, shelter, and clothing. What makes the difference between an ideal and an ordinary desire is that the former is above personal predilections, has to do with something higher than the narrow ego, and as such is capable

of being desired by all, at least theoretically. Thus an ideal may be defined as something un-self-centred and universally desirable, and such that the person desiring it wishes that everyone else also desired it. In this way, a system of ethics can be built up, which, though apparently impersonal, actually rests upon the personal basis of an individual’s desires. For example, one may wish that everybody understood science, and another that everybody appreciated art.

But then, there may also be a conflict of purely impersonal ideals. However impersonal the ideals may be, personal factors are inescapable. One may remember the occasion when Thrasyarchus, on hearing Socrates’s comments on the impersonal character of justice, argued that justice is what is in the interest of the strong. This raises a fundamental question in ethics and politics: Is there any standard by which ‘good’ and ‘evil’ can be judged, apart from an individual’s desires? Maybe there is, but it is not evident. The standard, whatever it is, is not as objective or verifiable as is a scientific proposition. So the situation seems rather hazy.

Religion has a simple answer: God determines what is good and what is bad, and that person whose will is in harmony with the will of God is a good person. But such an answer does not convince a rational mind. Even if it be said that God is good, it implies that there is a standard of goodness which is independent of God’s will. Besides, can we answer the question: Is there objective truth or falsehood in statements like ‘Pleasure is good’, as there is in a statement like ‘Snow is white’? Certainly not. These forceful arguments are the voices of reason, and we must listen to them. But then, reason is an obstacle as much as it is a help.

Living beings are conglomerates of body, mind, and Spirit. The last, being the subtlest, is the ruler of the body and the mind. We human beings are especially endowed with the gifts of body, mind, and Spirit. With the help of these we reach the Truth. The thinking mind is higher than the pleasure-seeking body, and the Spirit is higher than the mind. We are aware of two mental levels, higher

and lower. The more we identify ourselves with the higher mind by the practice of purity, selflessness, and love, the more we grow in knowledge and realize the oneness of existence. It is these things that make us better human beings. To the Vedantist, nothing in the universe is entirely bad: bad is only less good; false, less true; wrong, less right. For everything that belongs to the world is still in the making, very much in the process of being perfected. And nothing in the whole universe, however trivial it may seem, is without significance; not a particle is meaningless. Even a grain of sand contains within itself the whole universe, affirms the Vedantist.

The Whole as Truth

True knowledge is unitive. The illuminating Consciousness, or Brahman, is the common wealth of all. Ignorance is divisive, producing egocentric distortion and consequent fragmentation. We see difference when we fall from the state of Brahman. The one invisible, infinite Brahman alone exists. But we do not see It as we are under the spell of maya. The manifold is superimposed upon Brahman. So we see the paradoxical *jagat-prapancha* (phenomenal world) in place of Brahman. According to Vedanta, the One—and not the many—is true. What does it mean? Is ‘many’ unreal like fleeting shadows or vanishing dreams? Yes and no. Yes, if seen separated and segregated from the Whole, and no, if understood as emanations from the Whole. The point is best illustrated by the sea and the waves. Reality is the sea and we are the waves. Now the waves rise, now they recede. But seeming disappearance does not mean their extinction. Waves, as waves, are unreal, but they are real in the form of the sea. So are we: real from the standpoint of Reality and unreal and empty the moment we lose contact with the Whole. To understand all this, however, morality needs to be cultivated and purity of mind acquired. Then veil after veil of ignorance will begin to lift and we will realize more and more of the knowledge of Oneness. We become true human beings to the extent we are ignited by the fire of the higher Self, and this

ignition is only possible through diverse forms of yoga—work, love, and knowledge, the basis of all these being training of the mind.

The essence of education consists in the realization of our identity and relationship with the Whole. Under the rule of maya, we become partially blind, as it were, and, like the blind men in Sri Ramakrishna’s story, mistakenly think that the parts are the Whole. So we cannot get out of the maze. But spiritual seekers perceive the Whole, realize the Truth, and are at peace within and without. They accept the higher truth by cancelling or modifying the lower truth through the power of discrimination, and move from the less inclusive to the more inclusive, from the broad to the broader, from the less perfect to the more perfect.

Meaning of Perfection

Education, according to Swamiji, is the manifestation of inherent perfection. Perfection, briefly speaking, is the realization of one’s true Self, one’s Soul, as the culmination of one’s quest for the Infinite. Perfectionism is an ethical concept, according to which individuals and their actions are judged by a maximal standard of achievement, specifically, the degree to which they approach ideals of aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or physical perfection. Since frog-in-the-well attitudes have to be transcended for its attainment, perfection may require a departure from or even dispensing with standards of conventional morality. The standards of perfection are meant for the achievement of certain very rare levels of human possibility. Sophistication of perception and persistent attempts to catch glimpses of things higher than what is ordinarily cognized and felt, revealed and reached by conventional morality or existing norms—be they scientific values or artistic values—these matter most to the perfectionist. *(To be concluded)*

Reference

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5,258.

The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – III

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

THERE is something mysterious about the Ramakrishna phenomenon. Part of this is in the way he and Swami Vivekananda figure in apparently the most unlikely places. Moreover, the books that I come across are also part of the mystery. In a previous issue I cited Sri Ramakrishna appearing in an Oxford anthology on the supernatural edited by D J Enright. Now, if the guru figures in such a context, can his most illustrious disciple be left behind? In a second-hand bookshop in Hyderabad, I found tucked away in a corner a book entitled *The Mysticism and Magic of India*. ‘Magic’ I felt was disturbing. There are umpteen books on rope tricks, sadhus walking on nails or blazing fires, and such things which an average western collector of oriental exotica finds as fodder, as grist to the mill. But then I found ‘mysticism’ juxtaposed with magic, and that was certainly worth a look.

I was not disappointed. Indeed, I felt excited. A look at the index threw me into a daze. For, if there was no reference to Ramakrishna, there were exactly seven references to and citations from Vivekananda. But what is the book about? ‘This book teaches of Yoga but it does with a phase of Yoga of which you many never have heard. It also opens new avenues of thought as it presents laws, principles and universal concepts that are Oriental in nature.’ In short, the book is about ‘knowledge’ that is ‘startling’, true, and not ‘abstract’. It is about ‘the practice of magic’ by the magicians of India.

Reading this bit, I was rather put off. But another look, and I was intrigued. The author is thoroughly grounded in yoga and its principles as he begins to explore the *siddhis* which emerge as a by-product of yogic practices. And in explaining the rationale of the ‘Science of Pranayama’, he quotes

Vivekananda quite extensively (though the citations are at variance with those in the *Complete Works*¹): ‘The universe is manufactured from its subtle material (akasha) by the power of prana. Prana is the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of the universe’ (36). ‘To achieve the subtle perception of the finer forces which are operating in the physical body, we must first commence with the grosser perception and understand that the force which is setting the whole machine in motion is that of prana, the most obvious manifestation of which is the breath. ... Pranayama is the knowledge and control of prana’ (36–38). ‘Pranayama opens to us the door of the most remarkable powers. If one understood prana perfectly and could control it, every form of magic lies at his [the yogi’s] beck and call. ... He who has controlled prana has controlled his own body, and the bodies of others, because prana is the generalized manifestation of force’ (38).

The next citation from Swamiji occurs in the chapter on ‘Yogi Pranayama Practices’; the context is the power of ‘mantra: vocal cultivation’: ‘By right practice a beautiful voice will come to you. The Yogis are noted for their wonderful voices, which are strong, smooth and clear and have wonderful trumpet-like carrying power’ (63).

Swamiji is cited again in a very important chapter on ‘The Mystery of the Mind’ for an authentic exposition of the nature and function of *chitta*. This is a lengthy two-paragraph extract. In the first paragraph Swamiji explains the concept of *chitta vrittis* and how ‘all thought is but various processes in the mind-stuff called chitta’. And the author is not one who leaves such citations as mere supports for his viewpoint. He links them in a very subtle and sophisticated manner to his theme of magic.

After citing Swamiji, for instance, he traces the ideas to Patanjali and says, 'According to the teachings of the magicians, attached to each particle of matter there is a little particle of mind—in much the same way that the fog out of doors is caused by a little moisture to attach itself to each of the dust particles in the air. In the same way, one might say, a little particle of "mind stuff" is attached to every atom in the Universe, so that every atom has its own "atom consciousness" as it were' (75). Then he cites Swamiji on another aspect of yoga—pratyahara—(two paragraphs) and explains the implications (76) in his own acutely original way. Finally, he cites Swamiji's exposition on 'sex-energy' becoming 'ojas' (160–1) and says that this transmuted 'magnetism combined with the love-energy ... is used in magic as an additional source of power'.

I have dwelt on these citations at some length for two reasons: one is because, thanks to the works of Colin Wilson (example, *The Occult*), supernatural powers are being explored in a rational, empirical way so that the yogic by-products are being seen not as tricks of magic but as tremendous potential powers of awakened consciousness assuming concrete effects. The second reason is the enormous advances in neurosciences which are now revealing capabilities of the brain which are nothing short of—for want of a better word—miraculous. The works of, for instance, V S Ramachandran (*Phantoms in the Brain*), and James H Austin (*Zen and the Brain*) are uncovering aspects of consciousness which confirm (and I hope I am not being overzealous in saying so) Swamiji's experience-rooted insights enshrined in that all-time classic, *Raja Yoga*. It is now common to find several scientists of various disciplines pointing to parallels between Vedantic truths and their own empirical findings in studies on consciousness. For instance, Professor Bernard Baars (of the Neurosciences Institute in San Diego) points to the metaphor of 'theatre' as useful in understanding consciousness; an understanding which he says 'happens to be quite ancient, going back to Plato in the West and to the Vedantic scriptures in the East'.² Prof. Baars says he

was interested in transcendental meditation which is 'reasonably accurate' (19); he also refers to what he calls a 'fantasy experiment' which he wanted to do for a long time—about 'the fourth state of consciousness' which 'according to the Upanishads' is 'pure consciousness' which is simple because 'it is consciousness without content' (20–1).

Seen against this background, Swami Vivekananda's appearance in a book on mysticism and magic should not simply be dismissed as a pointer to the fascination for the oriental exotica of magic. His exposition is now slowly and steadily finding confirmation in the most complex areas of brain, mind, and consciousness studies. In short, *The Mysticism and Magic of India* is an important text of this genre. The author is the famous magician and writer Ormond McGill. The funny thing is that the copy which I came across (published by A S Barnes Company, New York, 1977) is inscribed to a magician in, of all places, Calcutta! The book also has a number of elegant illustrations, and the one which I found particularly pleasing was the one of the Vivekananda Rock.

Shiva-Shakti

In the previous instalment, I mentioned Shiva as the link for the present one. Shiva, of course, is in eternal union with Shakti. And my first reference is a scholarly (and in spite of that, balanced) study of popular goddess worship in West Bengal: *Offering Flowers and Feeding Skulls* by June McDaniel (New York: Oxford, 2004). The author is known for her earlier work *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (University of Chicago, 1989).

In spite of the fancy title, *Offering Flowers and Feeding Skulls* is not one of those all-too-slick studies of Hindu goddesses, especially Kali. It is cautiously written and shows a definite inwardness within the area of study. I found the author's views on Sri Ramakrishna vis-à-vis Shakta doctrine and practice, by and large, insightful, contextually relevant, and free from the overworked motifs of psycho-pathologists. In more than fifteen contexts the Great Master is cited. She finds him embodying

the ‘fourth type of devotion, universalist Shakta bhakti or Shakta Vedanta.’ This is, she adds, ‘a later development of the nineteenth century saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s Shaktism carried on through his disciple Vivekananda and his followers. It emphasizes the goddess’s true nature as *Brahman* rather than as a separate entity with philosophy and ethics as the best way to understand her. She is an ideal form or representation of the ultimate reality.’ And ‘the sacred texts for followers of this approach would be the biographies of Ramakrishna as well as classical Hindu texts such as the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*’. McDaniel also notes another offshoot of this: the equality of all paths. She says: ‘The goddess is understood to be present within all deities and all religions are legitimate paths to her worship.’ And, ‘the goddess’s form represents maternal love, and is the sweetest and most appealing to practitioners’ (146–7).

As for Shiva, we all remember (and who can forget) those emotive exhilarating incidents connected with Shiva in the life of the Great Master. In childhood, he enacted the role of Shiva and the absorption was so total that the discerning audience (how singularly fortunate they were!) knew, even if they did not understand it, that Gadai was not enacting a role. The absence of the original actor was meant to invoke the presence of the incipient Shiva himself. If any doubt lingers about the significance of this event, one need only recall what the *rasaddar* Mathuranath saw on the holy grounds of Dakshineswar: Ardhanarishvara Ramakrishna. He actually *saw*, and did not dream!

In addition to what I noted from McDaniel, the implications of what Mathur saw is echoed in another book—*Shiva: The Wild God of Power and Ecstasy* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2004) by Wolf-Dieter Storl, ‘a cultural anthropologist and educationist who has taught at Kent State University as well as in Vienna, Rome and Benaras’. The author cites the Master’s words about God as Mother: ‘Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with the mother, and consequently she

is dearest to the child’ (107). Therefore, comments Storl, ‘Since Shiva is only the silent immobile witness whereas she is the power herself, the devotees of Shakti and Devi have concluded that it might be best to direct one’s attention and prayers exclusively to the Goddess. ... Not the distant Father, but she, the Mother of All.’ And, he adds, ‘periodically, Christians have followed a similar mode of thought, turning foremost to Mary, the Virgin, who bore God and who is the Mother of the universe’. Obviously, the inter- and intra-personal connections between several manifestations of the Mother are a reassuring rebuff to divisive theology and devasting religious fundamentalism.

The next citation is also quite interesting. Generally, Mother Kali is portrayed as fierce and terrible with a lolling, blood-thirsty tongue. Few are aware of the Mother whose benign, blissful, maternal nature was unveiled by Sri Ramakrishna through his vivid, vibrant experiences. In short, the dark, antinomian Kali worshipped by Thugs is imbued with a different configuration by the Great Master. Commenting on this, Storl says: ‘With Sri Ramakrishna, the Bengali saint who started as a temple servant at a Kali temple in Calcutta, the cult of the Black Mother reached *new ethical heights*. *He honored every woman as Kali*’ (125; emphasis added). Thus one can safely say that in the nascent phenomenon of the global revival of Goddess religion, it is Sri Ramakrishna who brought into the centre the protective, loving, and lovable archetype of the Mother.

But the dark side, being in the very nature of things, cannot cease—and that is a different story. Therefore, one requires discrimination in dealing with the faith that everything is Shiva-Shakti. ‘This is easily said but difficult to realize,’ says Storl, and he illustrates the truth by citing the famous story of Sri Ramakrishna:

The Master said: ‘Everything that exists is God.’ The pupil understood it literally, but not in the true spirit. While passing through the street, he met with an elephant. The driver (mahut) shouted aloud from his high place, ‘Move away! Move

away!’ The pupil argued in his mind, ‘Why should I move away? I am God, so is the elephant also God. What fear has God of Himself?’ Thinking thus, he did not move. At last, the elephant took him by his trunk and dashed him aside. He was severely hurt, and going back to his Master, he related the whole adventure. The Master said, ‘All right, you are God. The elephant is God, but God in the shape of the elephant driver was warning you also from above. Why did you not pay heed to his warning?’

There is a point in my reproducing this passage *in toto*. Ramakrishna’s tales and parables are appearing in a retold form in many books and in various contexts. I feel that they have been absorbed into that vast ocean of tales—both oral and written, classical and folk—which enter the world consciousness in mysterious permutations and combinations. One can actually call them ‘globalized tales and parables’. And in the parable cited, says Storl, there is a ‘Good God’ but he can ‘as well wear the mask of a murderous Bhairava or a frenzied Kali’. This is, indeed, ‘the drama of confusion and suffering ...’ (199).

The celebrated author Paulo Coelho retells the story of a boy who believes Krishna is in the forest, and brings his teacher a pitcher from Krishna which fills up spontaneously on being emptied. The guru himself doesn’t believe the boy, and when the latter repeatedly requests Krishna to appear before the guru, Krishna says: ‘How can he possibly see me, my son? He doesn’t even believe I exist!’³

We have another contextual interpretation of Kali—the Divine Mother—and Sri Ramakrishna, very similar to that of Wolf-Dieter Storl, in a recent translation and commentary of *Devi Mahatmyam* by Devadatta Kali (Berwick: Nicholas Hayes, 2003; Indian reprint: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006). The author makes an interesting analysis: ‘Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa remarked that, in many household shrines, Kālī is worshipped as Śyāmā, the tender dispeller of fear and granter of boons. In times of natural disasters, she is invoked as the protective Rakṣākālī. As Śmaśānakālī, the embodiment of destructive power, she haunts the cremation grounds in the company of howling jackals and terrifying female spirits, and

as Mahākālī she is the formless Śakti who is not different from the Absolute’ (128).


All these should, I suppose, allay fears about the ‘times being out of joint’ because ‘the centre cannot hold’, as W B Yeats put it.

The Timeless Significance

Finally, I found an illuminating reference to Sri Ramakrishna in *Philosophers of East and West* by E W F Tomlin (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988; original edition by Harper and Row). Professor Tomlin describes the subject of this sizeable book of 526 pages as ‘the Quest for Meaning and Existence in Eastern and Western Thought’. It carries a foreword by Kathleen Raine who describes Tomlin as one ‘who writes from a rich background of knowledge gathered not from books but from having lived in many countries of the East and of the West’ and this book as ‘the fruit of the author’s clear understanding of complex thought’ (vii). Incidentally, Professor Tomlin was a close friend of T S Eliot, who began the modernist movement in English poetry, and wrote one of the most sensitive memoirs about him.

In his chapter on ‘The Hindu System’—the cleanest and most compact chapter—Tomlin records the global significance of the Great Master: ‘Perhaps, the most attractive of these sages was Sri Ramakrishna (1836–86) who, having made a close study of both Islam and Christianity, finally returned to Hinduism, and whose disciples, Brahmananda and Vivekananda have exerted almost as much influence abroad as in India herself. In these men, we see the Vedanta faith at its noblest pitch for they combined great intellectual force with personal humility.’ And coming to Sri Ramakrishna himself, Professor Tomlin says: ‘And we may perhaps see in Ramakrishna’s life-long devotion to Kali, the Mother Goddess of the universe, a link with that form of worship which may have antedated the Aryan invasion of India and which represents, however vaguely, a *natural acceptance by man of life in all its aspects*, the pain and destruction, (for Kali, besides being Creator, was [*sic*] also Destroyer) as well as rapture and fruition’ (201;

emphasis added).

I suppose there can hardly be a more befitting conclusion to this essay than Professor Tomlin's intuitive, incisive summing up of Sri Ramakrishna and his apostles' timeless significance: it antedates dates, days, calendars, clocks, and computers. After all, 'the One remains, the many change and pass'. 

References

1. Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9

vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama: 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.147–9; 1.167; 1.201.

2. Susan Blackmore, *Conversations on Consciousness* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 14.
3. 'Raj Tells Me a Story', in Paulo Coelho, *Like the Flowing River* (Harper Collins, 2006), 88–9. Another instance of a retold parable is found in Wayne Dyer—who has authored many books on practical spirituality for our times—in his recent work *There Is a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem* (Thorsons, 2001), 8–9; about this in the next instalment.

Parables of Sri Ramakrishna



Ganesha knows that the entire universe is in Mother Parvati



Jal, pani, aqua: water is water, by whatever name one calls it



When the kite drops the fish (of desire), the crows (of troubles) leave it alone



The mast of God's name is the refuge of the weary on high seas

IMAGES COURTESY OF RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA, RAJKOT

Madurai, the Legendary Temple City

N Hariharan

IT is a hot morning in mid-April. As the Chennai-Madurai Pandyan Express chugs in and grinds to a halt at Madurai station, Valli is in a flurry of excitement. The Chennai-bred girl is thrilled by the prospect of meeting her friend Selvi, a native of Madurai, and of launching with her into a week-long study and exploration of Madurai city. As she stands in the doorway looking expectantly, Selvi turns up. 'Welcome to the Temple City!' Walking briskly along the lengthy platform, Valli is delightfully surprised. 'What

a refreshing change! The station looks so spick and span!' she observes. With a gleam of pride in her eyes, Selvi says, 'You know something? Our railway station has been consistently winning the trophy for the best maintenance and upkeep, and the authorities are determined to retain it by making the station as passenger-friendly as possible.'

Outside the station the two friends find themselves confronted by a mob of autorickshaw drivers. Selvi waves them away with a gesture and heads for her two-wheeler. 'Thank God we have our own conveyance,' she mutters. 'A gullible stranger at their mercy is milked dry.' Turning to her companion, she says, 'Now, Valli, look at the frontage of the station. Doesn't it look like a mini temple? Look how the ivory-coloured tower is shimmering in the morning sun. Isn't it wonderful? It captures, in a quintessential way, the basic ethos of the city centring round the famed temple. The sta-

tion is also a temple, the temple of travellers!' Valli nods in admiration. Without any further ado, they mount the scooter and within a few minutes reach Selvi's home in Chockikulam, a posh locality in Madurai.



Minakshi Temple, Madurai

At the breakfast table, Selvi asks, 'So, Valli, I surmise your visit to Madurai is not so much for recreation as for a bit of research?' 'You're right,' answers Valli, 'I have a project to do on Madurai and I rely on you to collect and collate the details about the city.' Selvi replies, 'Well, Madurai is Janus-

faced, so to speak. It is congested, dusty, and noisy, to be sure; but behind the facade of cacophony and grime lurks the real Madurai—glorious, grand, and hoary. It has a unique place on the map of Tamil Nadu and a special niche in Tamilians' hearts. The city's global renown draws tourists in droves while it bursts at its seams with a population of 1.5 million. Though Madurai is a multifaceted gem of a city—it is and has always been an important centre of political, economic, social, and cultural activity—it is its cultural dimension that dominates and overshadows the other aspects. It can rightly be called Tamil Nadu's cultural capital. Standing on the banks of the Vaigai River, this beautiful city had been celebrated as the seat of Tamil learning and culture since ancient times. Its glory returned, though in a diminished form, in the earlier part of the last millennium. Present-day Madurai is spread over 22 square kilometres. The climate is tropical

and the main spoken languages are Tamil, English, and Saurashtra.

‘Madurai is one of the oldest cities of India with a history dating all the way back to the Sangam period. Later on, after its ransack by the ravaging armies of Delhi’s Malik Kafur, it came under the rule of the Vijayanagara kingdom. During the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the city was ruled by the Nayaka kings, the foremost of whom was Tirumalai Nayakar. The Sangam poet Nakkirar is associated with some of the *Tiruvilayadal* episodes of Lord Sundareshvarar, divine sports of Lord Shiva, which are enacted as part of temple festival traditions even today.’

Valli listens with rapt attention as Selvi continues with the story of Madurai’s hoary antiquity, its chequered history replete with gripping incidents, the vicissitudes of fortune it experienced as it passed through the corridors of time, and its amazing resilience even after repeated setbacks: ‘It was on the fecund literary soil of Madurai that the sturdy tree of Tamil literature had its luxuriant growth. The Sangam era, the golden age of Tamil literature, witnessed a veritable literary efflorescence in the form of masterpieces—and it was still early first millennium! Madurai was already the seat of the Tamil Sangam, or academy of learning. Eminent poets and scholars of great renown adorned the academy and brought undying fame to it.

‘However, Madurai has also been a spiritual sanctuary. The Minakshi-Sundareshvarar temple is a hallowed spot from which spirituality radiates and rejuvenates Madurai’s citizens. The temple is the city’s best-known landmark. The layout of the city resembles a lotus with its petals encircling the central bud. The temple is the bud round which run the thoroughfares of Madurai in concentric circles. In fact, the rectangular series of streets reminds one of the structure of the cosmos. The majestic towers of the temple, visible from every corner of the city, ensure that no stranger loses his way here. The old city lies on the southern side of the Vaigai. The northern side has seen an exponential growth of new settlements and colonies and forms part of the

new city.

‘In days of yore, Madurai was also a commercial centre, having trade links with places like Rome and Greece. It was visited by Megasthenes as early as the third century BCE. Under the able rule of the Pandyas, the city flourished until the tenth century



King Tirumalai Nayakar

BCE when it was captured by the Cholas, their arch-rivals. The Cholas ruled Madurai from 920 BCE till the beginning of the thirteenth century CE. In 1223 the Pandyas regained their kingdom and the city once again became prosperous. Tamil came to enjoy immense patronage, and it was during the Pandya reign that many masterpieces of that language appeared. *Silappadikaram*, the great Tamil epic, is based on the story of Kannagi, who burnt down Madurai to avenge the injustice caused to her husband Kovalan. In April 1311, Malik Kafur, the general of Delhi’s Alauddin Khalji, raided Madurai and plundered the city of precious stones, jewels, and many rare treasures. This was followed by a spate of attacks and raids by other Muslim rulers, and in 1323 the Pandya kingdom became a province of the Delhi Empire under the Tughluqs.’

Valli is touched by the chronicle: ‘I wonder why the fair face of Madurai has had to suffer thus at the hands of Destiny?’ Selvi is surprised by her friend’s emotional attachment to the city and continues her narration. ‘Flies converge on a ripe fruit. Madurai was a prize city that attracted the covetous glances of greedy kings. In 1371 the rulers of Hampi captured Madurai and it became part of the Vijayanagara empire. The Vijayanagara kings used to entrust the administration of captured territories to governors called Nayakas to ensure efficient management of the empire. The Nayakas paid an annual tribute to the Vijayanagara empire. After the death of Krishnadeva Raya in 1530, the Nayakas became in-

dependent and ruled the territories under their control. The most popular among them was Tirumalai Nayakar (1623–59), who is even now fondly remembered by the citizens of Madurai for the creation of many magnificent structures in and around the city. The Raja Gopuram of the Minakshi Amman temple, the Pudu Mandapam, and the Tirumalai Nayakar Mahal are an eloquent testimony to his artistic zeal.

‘Then occurred a turning point in Madurai’s history. It began to slip into the hands of the British East India Company. In 1781 the British appointed their representatives to look after Madurai; George Procter was the first collector. Be that as it may, a prominent name that figures in the history of Madurai is Rani Mangammal, a woman of great sagacity and administrative ability. Though women were generally believed to be unsuited to the exacting tasks of governance, Rani Mangammal shines as an example of an efficient and strong ruler.

‘Madurai is justly famous for its temples. Besides the Minakshi Temple, the Tiruvappudaiyar Koyil Thevara Sthalam and the Kudalalagar Divya Desam are the most important temples which none should miss seeing. In the vicinity of Madurai is Tirupparamkunram, one of the six Padai Vidu shrines of Sri Murugan glorified in Nakkirar’s *Tirumurugatrupadai*. Two other Divya Desams, Alagarkoyil and Tirumohur, are also in the neighbourhood.

‘But Valli, now that you have a fairly good idea of the place, let us take a tour of the city and I will tell you all that I know about the various places of interest. We start with the Minakshi temple.’

The Minakshi Temple

Within a few minutes, the girls reach the spot. Standing in front of the elegant three-storeyed gopuram facing the east, the main entrance to the temple, Valli is enraptured by its intricate and ornate sculpture. The sheer variety, craftsmanship, and deep motifs of the sculptural pieces awe her. ‘Marvellous! Surely, it is a sight for the gods!’ ‘Don’t exhaust all your admiration right here,’ interjects Selvi. ‘Reserve some for the wonders yet to come.’ Then she continues: ‘Look how even the approach to the

temple is filled with a divine fragrance. That is because these shops that you see on either side of the street vend puja articles like flowers, garlands, coconuts, incense sticks, camphor, sandalwood paste, betel leaves, haldi, and kumkum. And look at the pressing crowds of devotees waiting to step into the wide corridor of the temple. Isn’t the very atmosphere inspiring?’ Valli silently nods assent.

Selvi resumes her narration. ‘The Minakshi shrine is one of the fifty-one Shakti Pithas and is hailed as the seat of Budha, Mercury. It is one of the Pancha Sabhas, or Five Halls, of Lord Nataraja and is celebrated as the Velli Ambalam or Rajata Sabha where the Lord Shiva performed his mighty tandava dance for the sake of his devotees Patanjali and Vyaghrapadar at the time of his wedding with Goddess Minakshi. Devi Shakti had incarnated Herself as a Pandyan princess and married Lord Shiva. The glory of Minakshi-Sundareshvarar has been extolled in immortal hymns by the Shaiva saints Appar, Sundarar, Tirujnanasambandar, and Manikkavachakar, and in the works of erudite scholars like Paranjyoti Munivar, Kumara Guruparar, and Nilakantha Dikshitar.

‘According to some ancient texts, Madurai was earlier known as Halasya Kshetram, Kadamba Vanam, Tiru Alavoi, and Jivanmukti Nagaram. An interesting mythology centres round the city.’ The very mention of the word *mythology* rouses Valli’s curiosity. ‘Selvi, you know how I love mythology! I am all attention. Please carry on.’

Selvi continues: ‘Centuries ago, Madurai was a forest of *kadamba* trees. Once Indra, king of the gods, incurred the sin of killing a brahmana. In order to wash off the sin, he went on a pilgrimage. When he was roaming in this forest, he stumbled on a *svayambhu linga* under a kadamba tree. He performed severe penance there and felt thoroughly purified. He worshipped the linga with golden lotuses from a nearby tank, built a *vimana* over it, and returned to heaven. Since then, the gods started worshipping the linga. One day, a merchant by name Dhananjayan happened to spend a night near the shrine. He felt as if regular puja was being per-



Sculpture on the west gopuram

formed there. He apprised Kulashekhara Pandyan, king of Manavur, of the matter. At the same time, Lord Shiva, with honey dripping from his matted locks, appeared to the king in dream and commanded him to build a shrine there. The king hastened to the forest and offered worship to the linga, now encircled by a large serpent. Then he had a proper shrine built there and developed around it the city of Madurai in the shape of a lotus. Thus Madurai became the famous capital of the Pandyas.

'Kulashekhara was followed by Malayadhwaja. Malayadhwaja and his wife Kanchanamala were childless. In the course of one of the many yajnas that the royal couple performed in order to get a child, they were overjoyed to see a girl child emerge from the sacred fire. The child was named Tadatagai. But the girl had a queer appearance with three breasts. A disembodied voice, however, assured the worried king that the girl's third breast would disappear the moment she set her eyes on her future husband. Tadatagai grew up to be a heroic woman well

versed in the science of warfare, and in course of time succeeded her father to the throne. Now she set out on an expedition of conquest and brought the neighbouring kingdoms under her rule. Her triumphant march eventually took her to Mount Kailas, the abode of Shiva. A miracle happened on the battlefield as she confronted Shiva. Shiva's gaze made her shy and, lo, her third breast disappeared! Shiva promised to marry her at Madurai—so Tadatagai was none other than Devi Parvati—and she returned to her capital. In due time, the wedding of Shiva and Tadatagai took place and together they ruled Madurai for some time. A son named Ugra Pandyan, an incarnation of Murugan or Subrahmanya, was born to them. After crowning him as king, the couple assumed their divine forms and took their lodgement in the temple. That is why the images in the Madurai temple look so infused with divine power and radiate spiritual splendour.'

Valli is vastly impressed by the absorbing mythology behind the temple. Curious to know more

about its architecture, she asks, 'Selvi, the architectural elegance and sculptural beauty of the temple are simply staggering. How were such feats achieved?' Selvi, pleased with her friend's growing interest, answers: 'The origin of the temple fades into the mists of antiquity. Only a small shrine of Shiva existed in the seventh century CE. The Minakshi temple was built in the twelfth century. It represents the high-water mark of Dravidian architecture. The sculptural marvels that abound in the temple towers and the beautifully chiselled mandapams are a standing testimony to the skills of Tamil artisans. Of the eleven gopurams towering over the temple, the four nine-storeyed ones at the four main entrances are noteworthy. These were built between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The oldest is the east tower built by Manavarman Sundara Pandyan in the thirteenth century. The tallest and most imposing is the south tower rising to a height of 170 feet with its parabolic curve; it was built by Sevvantimurti Chettiar of Siramalai in 1559. The western tower was built by Parakrama Pandyan in the fourteenth century. Though of massive size, these towers look like exquisite ornaments studded with gems in the form of hundreds of *sudhai* statues—colourful images of gods, goddesses, animals, and mythical figures.

'The five musical pillars, each consisting of twenty-two smaller pillars carved out of a single stone and producing different notes when struck, are another great attraction for visitors. The sprawling



A yali

temple complex also consists of several mandapams. These are not just a chaotic jumble of jaded structures that pass off as mandapams, but well-planned halls that are artistic treasure troves.

'Since Goddess Minakshi is the presiding deity here, devotees enter the temple through the Ashtashakti Mandapam, or Abode of the Eight

Powers. Look at that lovely sculptural representation of Minakshi's wedding there over the entrance to the mandapam. See also the images of Ganesha and Subrahmanya installed on either side. The eight Shaktis are Kaumari, Raudri, Vaishnavi, and Mahalakshmi on the left and Yajnarupini, Shyama, Maheshwari, and Manonmani on the right. How attractive they look! Besides these, there are *dvarapalakas*, or guards, in front, and statues of Ganapati and Murugan. Aren't the wall paintings so lovely! They graphically depict interesting scenes of Shiva's miracles from Paranjyoti Munivar's *Tiruvilayadal Puranam*, which is regarded as the *sthala purana* (local legend) of the Madurai temple. The four figures adorning the eastern side are the four great Shaiva saints Tirujnanasambandhar, Tirunavukkarasar, Sundaramurty Nayanar, and Manikkavachakar. The Ashtashakti Mandapam was built by Rudrapati Ammai and Toliammai, the consorts of Tirumalai Nayakar. Here food used to be served to pilgrims who came from far-off places. Now you see fruit stalls on both sides of the building.

'A small mandapam with verandas running along either side connects the Ashtashakti Mandapam and the Minakshi Nayakan Mandapam. On the southern veranda, there is an eight-foot-high statue of Goddess Parvati. She is dancing with a *shulayudham*, a kind of spear, in one hand and resembles a huntress. A five-headed serpent shields her against sun and rain. On the northern veranda is a statue of a hunter. This is also eight feet high and is thought to represent Shiva as a hunter.

'Now we step into the Minakshi Nayakan Mandapam, named after its builder; it is also called Yali Mandapam. The structure is 160 feet long and 110 feet wide. Here we see before us six rows of 110 pillars, each 22 feet high. Every pillar bears the figure of a *yali*, a strange creature half lion and half elephant, at the top, and fascinating sculptural patterns at the bottom. At the western end is a massive 25-foot-high *tiruvatchi* containing 1,008 brass lamps! The array of lamps, when lighted, presents a magnificent sight. The *tiruvatchi* was installed by the Marudu Pandyas, and its maintenance costs

are even today met by the Shivagangai estate's hereditary trustee.

'On our way to Amman Sannidhi, or Mother's Presence, we pass through a seven-storeyed tower whose base is 78 feet long and 38 feet wide. The height of the tower is 177 feet. The tower is resplendent with a plethora of fine sculptures, 730 in all—a visual feast! It is rightly called Chitra Gopuram, or Marvellous Tower. The tower can be seen from the Adi Vithi, the first circular street around the Minakshi-Sundareshvarar shrines, at the spot where elephants are tethered, or from the western side of the Golden Lily Tank. Kalatinatha Mudaliar, son of Dalavoi Ariyanatha Mudaliar, built the tower in 1569. It is now maintained by the Shivagangai Devasthanam.

'Next comes the Mudali Pillai Mandapam, also known as the Dark Mandapam. This 60-foot-wide structure was built by Kadantai Mudaliar. Of the

myriad carvings here, the telltale figures of Bhikshadanar, the wives of the Darukavana sages, and Mohini are the most arresting. An interesting story is associated with the lovely women represented in these sculptures. Once the wives of the sages of Darukavana fell



Bhikshadanar Shiva

in love with Shiva when he appeared before them in the form of a *bhikshadanar*, or mendicant. His beauty so bewitched them that they stood mesmerized, unaware even of their garments. A connoisseur cannot but wonder at the way the sculptor has lavished all his skills on these statues. The statue of Bhikshadanar is true-to-life, evocative, and fully reflects the sculptor's artistic abilities. Images of Ganesha and Subrahmanya are also found in this mandapam. The term 'Dark Mandapam', however, is now a misnomer, as the building is now well lit and ventilated by windows.'

Golden Lotus Tank

As the pair move on, a large reservoir with stone steps on all four sides and a wide corridor running around it comes into view. Groups of people are sitting in the corridors and on the steps enjoying the cool breeze. 'Valli, this is sacred Potramarai Kulam, or Golden Lotus Tank. See the golden lotus floating at the centre of the reservoir? Hence the name. According to mythology, Indra once bathed here to rid himself of his sins. He collected golden lotus flowers from the tank and worshipped Shiva with them. The tank is 165 feet long and 120 feet wide and remains full for the best part of the year; it is hardly ever dry. Devotees wash their feet—and their sins, à la Indra!—in the pellucid water before entering the temple.

(To be continued)



Potramarai Kulam—the Golden Lotus Tank, and south tower

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



**The Cyclonic Swami:
Vivekananda in the West**
Ed. Sukalyan Sengupta and
Makarand Paranjape

Samvad India Foundation, N 16/B
Saket, New Delhi 110 017. Website: www.samvadindia.com. 2005. 212 pp. Rs 395.

This is a very important volume consisting of papers presented at a seminar organized by the Centre for Indic Studies, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, to assess Swami Vivekananda's impact on the West and his relevance to our times, a hundred years after his demise.

The papers in this volume have been authored by practising scholars as well as monks, both from the US and India. They examine Swami Vivekananda's unique contributions to such diverse fields as Buddhism, Christology, and the New Age, and their contemporary relevance. The transcript of a stimulating panel discussion—'Swami Vivekananda: the Next Hundred Years'—adds to the value of the volume.

The papers broadly relate to three main ideas. First is the post-Vivekananda Western approach towards Indian spiritual traditions. Carl T Jackson rightly concludes that Swami Vivekananda helped launch the first modern American encounter with Asian spirituality. The Swami's example influenced other movements (those associated with Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh, Bhaktivedanta, and others) that came later. Pravrajika Gayatriprana presents an interesting summary of her painstaking research on Vivekananda's contribution to the New Age, 'a movement in the West away from the dualistic Judeo-Christian tradition'. Peter A Huff provides a critical analysis and theological examination of what he describes as 'one of the most intriguing experiments in universal Christology: Swami Vivekananda's appropriation of Jesus as the sign and symbol for all humanity'. Finally, Rina Chakravarti presents details of an important event in Toronto—The Congress of Religion and Education of 1895—to which Vivekananda was invited, but which he could not attend. She discusses Vivekananda's spirit of universality and

the need for it today, against this background.

The second set of papers discusses the applicability of Vivekananda's message to the contemporary world. Almost all of them highlight Vivekananda's vision of a universal religion as the answer to today's problem-ridden world, torn apart by conflicting religious ideologies. Swami Atmarupananda gives us the details of 'Swami Vivekananda's Quest for a New Foundation for World Thought'. Hal French is of the view that Vivekananda's simple message to the world's faiths—'Help, and not hurt'—is still valid. And Sitansu Chakravarti believes that it is the spirit of unification and concern for others that took Vivekananda all the way to the West with a vision of creating global spiritual harmony.

The third important thrust of this volume is on Vivekananda's interpretation of Hinduism. Anantanand Rambachan emphatically contrasts Vivekananda's vision of Hinduism with that of the champions of Hindutva, especially that of V D Savarkar. The author finds Savarkar's concept of Hindutva (and this is a purely personal opinion of Rambachan's) narrow in comparison to Vivekananda's. Jeffery Long highlights how Vivekananda reclaimed Buddha for Hinduism. Makarand Paranjape addresses two issues: (i) how Vivekananda has been represented in the secondary literature on him, and (ii) what constitutes a 'fact' in a spiritual biography. He concludes that 'despite attempts to "historicise" and debunk Vivekananda, his enormous power and dynamism have continued to inspire generations of Indians and Westerners'.

In his introductory paper, Swami Tyagananda makes the pertinent point that our understanding of Vivekananda cannot be complete without a rediscovery of our own selves. Sukalyan Sengupta echoes this thought: 'If the reader believes that this publication [has] led him/her to embark on this fascinating journey of self-discovery, this publication would have served its purpose.' One can only add: 'Amen!'

The thought-provoking papers break fresh ground in several areas of Vivekananda studies and should prove invaluable not only for researchers and

critical thinkers but also for lovers of Indian culture and devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda. The editors deserve commendation on the quality of planning and editing. An index would add to the value of the volume.

Dr Visvanath Chatterjee

Former Professor, Department of English
Jadavpur University, Kolkata



Tales from the Puranas

Subash Mazumdar

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K M Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2005. xx + 372 pp. Rs 270.

The Puranas form an important component of the nation's religious and cultural history. The innumerable Puranic tales aim at promoting ethics, bhakti, and spirituality. Parables based on animal and plant life remind us about the unity of existence. But, in trying to understand them, the reader must not be obsessed with notions of rationalism, secularism, human rights, and the like. A cursory reader may consider some episodes in the Puranas bizarre, ludicrous, or bad in taste, and lacking in consistency. But one would do well to bear in mind that myths and allegories have their own power over human minds, a power that may be more potent than reason. Also, it would be anachronistic to view the values of Puranic times through the lens of present-day thinking.

A remarkable feature of Puranic stories is the skilful way in which sub-stories are nested within the main story (tales within tales) to illustrate an event or an idea. This sustains reader interest. The variety in these tales is astonishing. We come across *danavas* displaying their skills in cloning themselves when fighting enemies. Sometimes they hide behind women hostages to shield themselves from enemy missiles. One is reminded of Swami Vivekananda's words, 'The devil knows as much as God, is as powerful as God; only he has no holiness—that makes him a devil.' Egocentric characters, sages falling victim to passion, lust, jealousy, anger, and other vices; kidnappings, and curses pronounced in haste, are all found in abundance in these stories along with perfect, noble heroes and saints with immense spiritual energy. Women are respected and even admired for their character and wisdom.

Here are some illustrative examples: *Markandeya Purana* mentions an instance when apsaras begin to

challenge one another for the top position in Indra's court. All but one quietly withdraw, finding the test to determine the best a risky assignment—enticing the mercurial sage Durvasa. Sita is cursed by a parrot for her harsh treatment and hence suffers separation from Rama. A king resents the prince's insistence on marrying a vaishya girl. His counsellors suggest a strange solution—let him officially marry a kshatriya princess and arrange a 'relationship' with his sweetheart!

Certain tales may appear unconvincing and some others inappropriate for children. Brahma's momentary loss of self-control (tale 8) and Vishnu being compelled by circumstances to commit a crime (tale 98) are instances in point. 'Churning of the Ocean' (tale 22) is a good story, although children are bound to question the contradiction between the story and the actual science of an eclipse. The future generation of grandmothers will have to be fully equipped to explain Puranic tales such as these to their grandchildren.

On the other hand, there are many stories that will be found rewarding by both children and adults. The stories of Jadabharata (tale 20), Satyabhama (tale 31), and Nandini granting a boon (tale 59) are among them. There are tales focusing on virtues such as courage, compassion, selflessness, absence of ego, truthfulness, and sacrifice that will help in developing a healthy character. Those familiar with the childhood of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi will understand the influence exercised by such stories on young minds.

Generally, Puranic stories need careful reading if one is to understand the characters. For instance, tale 71 exposes the perils in seeking a boon for an unduly long life—the beneficiary suffers isolation, with his relations and friends departing on time! One is reminded of the Greek myth about a person seeking immortality but failing to ask for eternal youth. The story of the asura Vajranabha (tale 73) is interesting for a variety of reasons. Here, a wicked asura is willing to put on hold his attack on the gods and examine Indra's suggestion to refer the dispute for arbitration to their common ancestor. The asura also has refined aesthetic tastes (much like Ravana), and enjoys fine arts. Later in the story, his daughter rises above filial sentiments, and not only advises but even blesses her husband for success in his righteous fight against her father.

Some of the hundred and twenty stories are at variation from the popular versions, and there are also a few repetitions. But these do not detract from

this interesting compilation that will engage the attention of young and old alike.

P S Sundaram
Mumbai



Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Nagpur

G Venkataramana Reddy

Ramakrishna Math, Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg, Dhantoli, Nagpur 440 012.
E-mail: rkmath_ngp@sancharnet.in.
2006. vi + 97. Rs 30.

Architectural engineering is in essence a blend of Art and engineering. It is not unusual to see one of the two elsewhere in the world but quite rare to see artistic engineering—a happy treat to the eye—in which aesthetic beauty and practical utility are combined harmoniously. This certainly needs a combination of imagination, intellect, and practicality; of head, heart, and hands. To harmoniously blend the different architectural forms of different cultures from across the world, which are quite independent and self-sufficient on their own, in the Sri Ramakrishna Temple—keeping their original individuality intact, not producing a veritable chimera, creating a balanced symphony that will enthral the viewers and, at the same time, bringing peace and harmony to the mind—is undoubtedly a difficult and onerous task. The temple at Belur Math is one such balanced symphony.

The book is a monograph that details the combination of architectural forms used in the Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Nagpur. The author also explains the importance, evolution, and philosophical symbolism of the Sri Ramakrishna temple. The book then describes the effort that went into the making of the Nagpur temple. There is also an illuminating introduction to Vastu Shastra, the scriptures that lay down the rules for civil constructions, looking at everything as embodiments of the Divine. The book mentions the ethos and culture of the Vidarbha region and how elements of local traditional architecture were kept in the forefront while blending them with the architectural features of monuments of various religious traditions.

This short book gives an insight into the planning of Hindu temples in general and Sri Ramakrishna temples in particular and will be a valuable read for people desiring to know more about temple architecture and its relation to Vastu Shastra.

The chief drawback of the book lies in its hasty

compilation that has allowed inconsistencies and typographical errors to creep in. These can, of course, be easily remedied in future.

Swami Sarvottamananda
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University
Belur



What Makes People Give Their Best

N H Atthreya

MMC School of Management, 3E1 Court Chambers, New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020. 2005. xx + 124 pp. Rs 96.

The thing that strikes you first about this slim volume is that it is wholly in verse. Business management and verse certainly do not seem to go together, but Atthreya has an eminently practical reason to back his poetry. He claims that reading comprehension is facilitated when material is presented in terms of thought units or whole phrases. (Actually it does read quite well, the sheer unconventionality holding your attention somehow.)

Successful organizations have three practices—caring for the customer, innovation, and concern for their people. This book focuses on the ‘people’ dimension. The people who work in your organization are your ‘internal customers’—this term is at the core of a paradigm shift in how you look at co-workers and employees. Your people are naturally interested in excellence, Atthreya argues, it’s just that they think, ‘Why should I do it for you? You don’t seem to deserve it.’ The human relation between you and your co-workers is the key to excellence in performance. Atthreya develops many aspects of this theme. For example, ‘It is not enough if you approve of what I do/You will have to show your approval.’

Another insight is that business is good when both management and workers want to give—a competition in giving, not a competition in taking. For this the initiative is always with the management. As always, the key to good relations is simply the understanding that *relationship is reciprocal*. Again, *how you are to me* matters more to me than *what you are* (i.e., how efficient, successful, or qualified you are). Nothing revolutionary here, but plenty of management wisdom presented unconventionally is what you will get when you purchase this volume.

Swami Sarvapriyananda
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University
Belur

REPORTS

Correction: The image appearing at the top of page 131 of the January 2007 issue was mistakenly identified as being of Brother Giles. The image is of Saint Giles, who was born in Athens, Greece, in the 7th century CE.

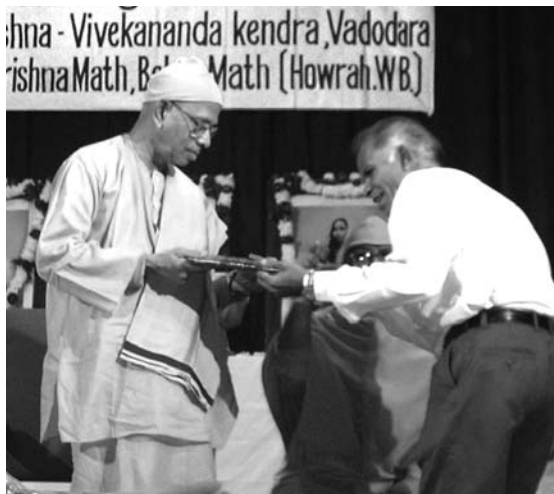
REPORTS

Annual Meeting of Ramakrishna Mission

The 97th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 17 December. Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, held the chair. In attendance were 122 monastic members, 60 lay members, and 46 associates. A report follows on page 212.

New Centre of Ramakrishna Math

Ramakrishna Math, Vadodara, a new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math, has been started on a plot of land at Kalali measuring nearly 2.4 acres. The new math grounds, situated about seven kilometres from Vadodara Station, were received by Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, from Sri Prakash Joshi, President, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Kendra, Vadodara, at a hand-over ceremony on 6 December at C C Mehta Auditorium, Vadodara, in the presence of a large number of dignitaries and citizens of Vadodara and monks and devotees from various parts of Gujarat.



Swami Smarananandaji receives deed from Sri Prakash Joshi



Statue of Swami Akhandananda, with monks, and students of the free coaching centre, Sargachhi

News from Branch Centres

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new Centenary Building for the polytechnic at **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, on 6 December. About 110 monastics and 1,200 devotees attended the three-day inaugural function from 6 to 8 December. Swami Smarananandaji inaugurated the Computer and Networking Labs and also a Video Conference System in the polytechnic on 22 December.

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj unveiled a bronze statue of Swami Akhandananda at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi** on 23 December. He also inaugurated the ashrama's newly renovated campus at Mahula, 3 kilometres from Sargachhi, where Swami Akhandananda had stayed for eleven months and organized the first relief operations of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Lt Gen. (Retd) K M Seth, Governor of Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the non-formal education

centre for tribal boys and girls of nearby villages at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, on 26 November.

Relief

Winter Relief: 4,799 blankets were distributed to poor people affected by the severity of winter through the following centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission: Agartala, 100; Baghbazar, 450; Chandigarh, 227; Cherrapunjee, 1,000; Cooch Behar, 300; Jalpaiguri, 200; Karimganj, 500; Porbandar, 300; Puri (Math), 1,000; Rahara, 122; Sargachhi, 600.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items to poor and needy persons of

nearby areas: **Agartala:** 50 saris, 25 dhotis, and 52 children's garments; **Jalpaiguri:** 105 steel plates; **Porbandar:** 250 kg sugar, 250 kg edible oil, and 62.5 kg tea powder; **Rahara:** 34 pants, 34 shirts, 54 frocks, 193 saris, 14 dhotis, and 29 litres coconut oil; **Sargachhi:** 660 kg rice.

Refugee Relief: Owing to ethnic disturbances in Sri Lanka, thousands of families have moved to Batticaloa district. **Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa** served bread, dal, and jam to 99 families at Kotamunai Kanishta Vidyalayam camp and 410 persons at Sarada Vidyalayam (Manchenthoduvai) camp in Manmunai North Division of the district. Also, 377 patients were treated in different camps.

General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission: Synopsis of the Governing Body's Report

The 97th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 17 December 2006, at 3.30 p.m.

The members recorded with deep sorrow the passing away of Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the thirteenth President of the Mission, on 25 April 2005. He was an internationally acclaimed speaker. His mahasamadhi created a huge void in the hearts of monastics and countless devotees. It is an irreparable loss to the organization. Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj was appointed the fourteenth President.

During the year under review, the Mission started new centres at Vadodara in Gujarat, Aurangabad in Maharashtra, and Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh.

In the medical field, during the year, the following activities deserve special mention: the starting of an eye-care theatre at Muzaffarpur centre, a charitable dispensary with an eye operation theatre at Kamarpukur centre, an intensive care unit and an operation theatre complex at Vrindaban Sevashrama, a mobile medical unit at Itanagar centre, and a blood component separation unit and a renovated neurosurgery ward at the Polyclinic of Lucknow centre.

In the educational field, during the year, the

following deserve special mention: the starting of a Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education for BEd and MEd courses (under Vivekananda University) at Coimbatore centre; BSc (Hons) course in College of Nursing at Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata; MSc course in Chemistry at Narendrapur college, Kolkata; Vivekananda Institute of Algal Technology at Vivekananda College in Chennai; Vivekananda Institute of Value Education and Culture (VIVEC) at Porbandar centre; and non-formal education, vocational training, health awareness programmes, etc. in jails and correctional homes by our centres at Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, and Belur (Saradapitha). This apart, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (an autonomous body of the UGC) accredited the College of Education and Maruthi College of Physical Education at Coimbatore centre with 'A' and 'B++' grades respectively.

In the rural development field, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, awarded Nirmal Gram Puraskar to Lokasiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre in recognition of its exemplary work for the promotion of rural sanitation in the country. The significant achievements of Lokasiksha Parishad during the year are: (a) constructing

65,100 low-cost toilets and educating 9,56,076 people on health, hygiene, and safe drinking water; (b) providing arsenic and iron removal filters in 118 blocks in West Bengal; (c) implementing forest fringe dwellers development activities in 16 forest ranges of 3 districts in West Bengal focusing on 6,315 tribal families.

Under the Ramakrishna Math, the following deserve special mention: starting of new centres at Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu; and inauguration of two free tailoring and embroidery training centres for women at Adipur and Dhaneti in Kutch district by Rajkot Ashrama.

Outside India, during the year, the following new sub-centres were started: one sub-centre of St Louis centre in USA and three sub-centres of Sao Paulo centre in Brazil. A new Math centre was started at St Petersburg, Florida, USA.

During the year, the Math and Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs 14.34 crore, benefiting 10.21 lakh people

belonging to 1.71 lakh families of 2,075 villages.

Welfare work by way of scholarships for poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick, and destitute people, etc. amounted to Rs 5.35 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 82.71 lakh people through 15 hospitals and 178 dispensaries including mobile ones and the expenditure incurred was Rs 51.45 crore.

Nearly 6.25 lakh students including about 2.88 lakh girls were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to postgraduate levels. A sum of Rs 98.71 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 17.94 crore.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and continued help.

Swami Smaranananda
General Secretary

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Book Release: The Story of Ramakrishna Mission

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released the book *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission* (published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata) at the annual meeting of the General Body of Ramakrishna Mission on 17 December 2006. On that occasion, Swami Bhajananandaji, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, introduced the book with the following remarks:

Ramakrishna Mission celebrated its centenary from May 1997 to May 1998. To organize the year-long celebrations a committee under the chairmanship of the General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, had been formed. The committee took the decision to publish a commemorative volume to mark the event. Accordingly, an Editorial Board, consisting of the following members, was formed: Swami Lokeshwarananda (Chairman), Swami Prabhananda, Swami

Bhajananda, Swami Purnatmananda, Professor Nirod Baran Chakraborty, and Professor M Sivaramkrishna. For various reasons the book could not be published during the centenary year or the next few years.

It was therefore decided to bring out the book as an independent volume under the title *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission: Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Fulfilment*. It is a massive volume consisting of 1,220 pages, with 65 articles and 130 colour pictures. Apart from the introduction, which gives the purpose and plan of the whole book, the book is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and the part they played in the formation of Ramakrishna Mission. The second part gives the history of the Ramakrishna Movement in India,

America, and other parts of the world. The third part deals with the contributions made by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in educational, medical, rural development, and other fields. The fourth part discusses the philosophical concepts which form the ideological base of the Ramakrishna Movement.

The book has been subsidized to make it affordable to all; its price is only Rs 350 (postage Rs 50 in India).

I would like to say a few words explaining the use of the term *story* in the title of the book. There are a few famous books which use the term, such as *The Story of Mankind* by Hendrik Willem Van Loon and *The Story of Civilization* by Will and Ariel Durant. Now, a story is different from a history.

History is about the outer happenings in the lives of persons and institutions, whereas story is about the inner dynamics of a person or institution. History deals with the body, whereas story deals with the soul. Story refers to the unfolding of the soul, the unfolding of a vision, the unfolding of power, in a person or institution.

Every centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has a story to tell. The Belur Math itself has a long story to tell. From Belur Math go to Saradapitha, to Bankura, to Manasadwip, to Shella and Cherrapunjee, or go to the southern centres Chennai, Bangalore, Thiruvananthapuram—every centre has a unique story to tell. It is a story of love, dedicated service, and sacrifice. The whole Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has been built by the loving service and sacrifice of hundreds of monks and lay devotees. The story of their courage, endurance, and privation has never been fully told. The sincere work and sacrifice undertaken by hundreds of our monastic and lay brothers will ever remain untold, as most of them have passed on to the unknown. The present book will at least remind us of the untold story of our forgotten brothers.

The term *story* in the title of the book also refers to the work of Sri Ramakrishna, whom Swami

Vivekananda regarded as the avatar of the present age. It is the power of Sri Ramakrishna that sustains the Ramakrishna Movement. *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission* is actually the story of the unfolding of Sri Ramakrishna's power through the

Mission's various institutions. Swami Vivekananda gave his master's name to the service institution that he started because he knew that the work he was doing was really Sri Ramakrishna's mission on earth for the spiritual welfare of humanity, and that his own role was to set in motion an effective machinery for the furtherance of his master's mission far and wide, among all people without any distinctions of caste, creed, class, race, or place. This book tells the story of how thousands

of people work as instruments in the hands of the Lord. Through this work they make their own lives and the lives of others blessed.

Lastly, Ramakrishna Mission now stands at the dawn of the third millennium. The world all around us is changing at an incredible pace, and immense possibilities are before us. Let us first take stock of our spiritual heritage. The highest and broadest philosophical ideas in the world are with the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The noblest ideals in the world are with us. Our Sangha has produced the largest number of illumined souls in recent centuries. Our greatest wealth is the Holy Trio. In the whole history of humanity, we cannot find greater personalities than Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji. They are our greatest wealth.

We have a great spiritual heritage. It is our duty to pass it on to the next generation. *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission* tells us what we can pass on to the next generation.



Correction: The image appearing at the top of page 131 of the January 2007 issue is mistakenly identified as being of Brother Giles. The image is of Saint Giles, who was born in Athens, Greece, in the 7th century CE.

